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The Portrait
OF A SCHOLAR

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THE PORTRAIT OF A SCHOLAR

and other Essays written in *Macedonia*

1916—1918

By

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NOTE

HAVING been persuaded to think these essays worth collection, I have thought it prudent not to try to make them better. The circumstances of their composition in camps and dug-outs and troop-trains give them a kind of unity, and may excuse some of their defects.

The titlepiece has been printed in Dr. Jackson's *Memoir of Ingram Bywater* (second impression 1919); *Old Books*, *Textual Criticism*, *The Art of Quotation*, *The Decay of Syntax*, and *Johnson in Scotland* are reprinted by courteous permission from the Times Literary Supplement; *Silver Spoons* has been printed in the Oxford University Magazine. The remainder are published for the first time.

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The PORTRAIT of a SCHOLAR

His studies had been so various, that I am not able to name a man of equal knowledge. His acquaintance with books was great, and what he did not immediately know, he could, at least, tell where to find. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day now passes, in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.—JOHNSON'S *Character of Mr. Gilbert Walmsley.*

MY old friend was no walker. Yet the picture which recollection chiefly invokes is of a spare figure, much swamped and muffled in great-coats and a soft hat, stepping delicately down the High Street of Oxford, and pausing to regard the windows of booksellers and antiquarians with a chill glance of recognition and dispraise. There was an unconscious *fastidium* in that walk, and in the aquiline cast of his old face in repose, which expressed the innocent arrogance of his mind. A natural aristocracy spoke in his bearing, to the exclusion of any mark of occupation. He was no more like a great scholar than anybody else ; but he might have been

an ambassador, or the head of a great banking house. He might have been a duke of the premier line.

He was in fact a very great scholar. Many who knew him by his recensions of the text of Aristotle and by his casual conversation—his copious memory was stored with the lapses of lesser scholars—thought of him as profoundly versed in the diction of Greek philosophers and the principles of textual criticism, and by the same token preoccupied to excess with minutiae of idiom, inordinately solaced by professional scandal. The travesty is risible, but it is fostered by a vulgar error. There is no humaner science than grammar, and few more exciting pursuits than textual criticism ; but the dry bones of both studies attract the spade of unenlightened industry, and the fair name of classical scholarship suffers from the multitude of its drudges.

The subject of my portrait was a great scholar, as only those few can be who laboriously cultivate a rare natural gift. The penetralia of the ancient world are not to be reached save through the long and dusty corridors of modern learning ; and only by a saving grace of genius will the student reach the farther end with senses unimpaired. Our scholar knew the history of classical learning as it is unlikely it will ever be known again, and read ancient literature with a taste and feeling undimmed by a cobweb. He told me once, he had read the

Choephoroe in the train that morning : 'You know, it 's monstrously good.' The quotation does feeble justice to my vivid sense of his being as intimate with Aeschylus as he was with Browning, and as intimate with Politian as with either. He was so profoundly versed in the literature and the manners of many ages, that he would speak of Sir Thomas More, or of Burke, very much as he spoke of Swinburne ; as if he had known them.

Few even of his friends, I imagine, suspected the prodigious range of his attainments. He did not suspect it himself. He had no vulgar avidity of information or conceit of versatility, and of many branches of modern scientific and mechanical knowledge was content to remain as ignorant as a gentleman need be. He acquired his knowledge with an easy deliberation, and kept it by mere tenacity and a sure instinct for selection. In conversation his native courtesy chose subjects with which he knew his interlocutor to be familiar ; and the Renaissance scholar who knew that he lived on terms of close intimacy with Erasmus and the Scaligers might well remain in ignorance of his equal familiarity with Diogenes Laertius, or the Elizabethan dramatists, or the historians of the Peninsular War. Till he warmed to a subject his knowledge was always shy ; he was not to be drawn ; and it was felt that the attempt would be indecent. The loftiness of his

own standard was more surely betrayed by the alarm he evinced at the rare discovery of a gap in his knowledge. At a meeting of a learned society over which he presided, a member, while reading a commentator's note, boggled at a word and applied to the president for its meaning. '*Sicilicus—sicilicus!*' There was a silence as he made his way to the dictionary. '*Sicilicus.* It means the forty-eighth part of an *as*, and, by metonymy, it means a comma.' Then, replacing the book and turning to his audience, in accents of unfeigned dismay—'I didn't *know that!*'

Circumstances allowed me to spread my net wide. My relations with him were in part professional, and it was often my business to seek from him information or counsel on various projects of learning. This required a degree of tact, and even the most careful application was not always successful. He would sometimes profess nescience, or preoccupation, or even indifference. But when his interest was stimulated the results were surprising. He liked to have notice of awkward questions. If his mind was a well-stored encyclopaedia, it was an incomparable bibliography. His cash resources were as nothing to his credit. He had a rare nose for books, and anything that lurked in a book he could track to its lair. He was seldom visible before lunch time; and I think of

him as spending long mornings in his library, pacing the floor with his delicate step, lighting and relighting his big pipe, and ever and again pouncing hawklike on his quarry. Scholarship and lexicography owe much to those unrecorded searches.

. . . . . .

His published works, though their volume is respectable, afford but rare glimpses of the range of his learning or the play of his discursive judgement. They are confined strictly to his professional avocation, and are the best illustration of his favourite censure, 'It isn't a businesslike book'. But their quality, if severely, if even regrettably restrained, is the mirror of his exact, profound, and laborious scholarship. Of its exactness I once made a searching experiment. He had commissioned me to read the proofs of his last and most important book. So honorific an invitation could be received only as a command; but it was embarrassing, the more so as a handsome and equally obligatory honorarium was attached. The substance of the commentary I could not presume to criticize; and how should I earn my guineas by the barren labour of verifying references which I was sure had been tested again and again, any time those twenty years? I cast here and there; but the most assiduous angler will flag under the conviction

that there are no fish in his waters. I fell in despair upon the *index verborum* ; and by erasing a word in the text, as I checked each entry, hoped at last to reap a harvest of *paralipomena*. A grotesque, but perhaps a unique labour ; I pursued it with zeal. My mind misgave me when I got to ϕ, and found the pages of the text all but obliterated ; and when I reached the last word in the index, and turned to the text for my reward, all I had to show for my toil was one lonely word overlooked, a single islet in a sea of erasure.

If the old man had a vanity, it was that being a great scholar, who lived to celebrate as a Regius Professor the jubilee of his matriculation, he preferred to envisage himself in a metropolitan setting. Affectionate loyalty forbade a hint that Oxford was parochial ; but there was a modest gratitude in the explanation, 'I have a house in London'. Certainly those who knew him only in the streets of Oxford, in the high gloomy room in Wolsey's Quad, or the very ordinary villa in the Parks, missed the cream of his urbanity. But I think fondly of the Oxford house. It was there I first enjoyed his familiar conversation, and heard him quote the saying of Chandler—'a better Aristotelian than I shall ever be'—that 'the first half-dozen chapters of any book of Aristotle are really very well done'. It was there that on the eve of his leaving Oxford he

invited me to call on him at five o'clock, 'when I shall be still able to give you some tea'. I have often smiled, as I smile now in fond amusement, at something engaging in that phrase. The amenities of tea were unruffled by any squalor of packing; and the object of the invitation was to load me with books. They were duplicates, he explained, and it was therefore in my power to do him a kindness.

But the house in Kensington was more amply expressive. A house is infinitely communicative, and tells many things besides the figure of its master's income. There are houses that confess intellectual penury, and houses that reek of enlightenment. The habitations of professors are in general, perhaps, too apt to emphasize the dignity of labour. This, on first showing, was merely the house of a cultivated gentleman of easy fortune, liberal tastes, and ample leisure. Here were no telephones or lists of engagements, no display of the apparatus of research. The study at the top of the house confessed itself a workroom; but even there his guests breathed a serene atmosphere. If there was any litter it was a litter of pipes and tobacco jars, and if any books lay on chairs or tables they were probably recent acquisitions which had not yet been assigned their places. If the house was unlike a laboratory it was equally

unlike a museum ; the responsive visitor felt that his senses were agreeably amused, but became only by degrees aware that the furniture was more than good, the silver better than old, the books not only handsome but rare and precious. Of books, and especially of early Greek books, he was a systematic collector ; his other possessions he had acquired by the same gift which gave him his miscellaneous information ; he never seemed to know anything that was not worth knowing, and his house, by the same *flair*, held nothing one might not have been tempted to covet.

Of his tastes and opinions I can qualify none as prejudice, unless it be his dislike of chrysanthemums ; but there were proclivities and avoidances as characteristic and as amiable as the best of prejudices. I do not think he had any love of the sublime in nature ; I have heard him avow a distaste for mountains, and he never spoke of Switzerland except as a natural obstacle. He loved the ordered landscapes of South England ; he loved Paris, and he loved the Mediterranean. He never visited Greece, and did not regret the omission. I think he had his own vision of the Academy and the Lyceum, and shrank from the desecrated temples and the spurious pretensions of modern Athens. But he travelled much in Italy, and more in Spain ; and his mind was stored with

rich impressions of old cities, of noble libraries, gorgeous palaces, solemn rituals. Perhaps the disapprobation of mountains extended itself to the lesser pinnacles of human architecture ; I think of him, at all events, as less moved by domes and buttresses than by the dim magnificence of interiors, by porphyry and bronze and incense and the pomp of the mass. He told me once that were he a pious millionaire desirous of raising a monument to the glory of God and for his soul's good, he should not spend his money on spires and arches, but should buy a building in a street, with no exterior but its modest frontage, and lavish his resources on gorgeous incrustations.

To see him among his books was to learn a lesson in piety. When he described the printed catalogue of his choicest volumes as *Elenchus librorum vetustiorum apud . . . hospitantium*, he was guilty of no affectation of modesty. He did not conceal a collector's just pride of possession ; but you need only see him take a book from its shelf to know that he felt himself the ephemeral custodian of a perennial treasure. There is a right way and a wrong way of taking a book from the shelf. To put a finger on the top, and so extract the volume by brutal leverage, is a vulgar error which has broken many backs. This was never his way : he would gently push back each of the

adjacent books, and so pull out the desired volume with a persuasive finger and thumb. Then, before opening the pages, he applied his silk handkerchief to the gilded top, lest dust should find its way between the leaves. These were the visible signs of a spiritual homage. His gift of veneration was as rich as his critical faculty was keen; if a book was of the elect it was handled with a certain awe.

He was easily persuaded to do the honours of his collection. One book would suggest another, which would be taken down in its turn to prompt further comment and reminiscence. He did not disdain the collector's foibles; he liked to point out that this was a clean copy and that a tall copy; or even, with a smile that confessed a weakness—'It has the blank leaf at the end!' The importance of these qualities may seem to be exaggerated by booksellers' catalogues, when they deplore a missing dedication or measure values with a millimetre scale; but an accurate regard for them is common to connoisseurs, and should not be held to argue an undue concern for externals. Here, at all events, was no room for such a suspicion; for it could not be supposed that he had not read his books.

His standard was as high in this as in less important matters. He condemned as ignorant the modern passion for old Sheffield plate. Old

Sheffield might be very well; but no one of the period bought Sheffield for any better reason than that he could not afford to buy silver. He was equally contemptuous of the exaggerated value now set upon old English cottage furniture, which he regarded as barbarous. He named a lady who had filled her rooms with it: 'You know, the house of a baronet's widow oughtn't to be like the bar parlour of the *Pig and Whistle*.' His taste in books was as severe. He often mentioned an excellence—'It 's a good copy; it 's a better copy than the one in the British Museum'—but I do not remember his owning a defect. I must suppose that he had no poor copies. The same standard was applied to the discrimination of the products of presses and centuries. He loved the best, and had no reason for putting up with what was inferior. I do not think anything later than the sixteenth century had much power to stir him.

I was very sensible of the beauty of his books—the fine old Italian print, the fair margins, the armorial bindings eloquent of worthy ownership. I felt myself incompetent to appraise the rare industry and rarer learning by which the collection had been formed. But no profound acquaintance with a subject or a period was required to appreciate his knowledge of books in general, their every circumstance and attribute. He answered to any and every

test, 'Yes. I know the book. I have a copy. It isn't a rare book.' It has been said of him that if he had not been a great scholar he might have been one of the greatest of all booksellers. His instinct for prices was uncanny. Of imprints he could talk by the hour ; whether *Londini* or *Londinii* were the preferable form ; of the Paris imprint, which at a certain date appears as *Parisius* (a fact not generally known) ; of a well-known scholar who imagined that *Hafnia* was Hanover, but might have remembered Campbell—'Hafnia and Trafalgar'. His regard for myself, I cannot doubt, had at least its origin in my unfeigned appreciation of such particulars of controversy, obscurity or scandal. My memory, by the same predilection, retains these anecdotes, while preserving only a vaguer sense of the range and charm of his talk, the mordant perspicacity of his judgements. We are accustomed to associate candour and charity with an amiable character ; but greatness of mind is allowed to justify a measure of cynicism ; and his censorious worldliness was so rooted in wisdom, and so divorced from all vanity and pettiness of spirit, that I found it not only more entertaining, but even more lovable, than the most good-natured disposition to see the best in everything. He had no regard for established reputations, or none that he allowed to obscure his judgement ; and the surprise with which he recognized the

ignorance and mendacity of mankind was the measure of his intellectual probity.

> Scorn looked beautiful
> In the contempt and anger of his lip

as he pronounced the final verdict, 'It 's a shoddy book'. Most books, if not shoddy, are yet, in his other phrase, 'not important'; and if his admiration was less often exercised than his censure, it was less often deserved. It was the more impressive. He seldom quoted a saying of his own; but he was fond of relating how, in an academic committee, some one who should have known better had suggested, on a proposal to further the study of inscriptions, that people who dabbled in inscriptions were always charlatans. 'Do you call MOMMSEN a charlatan?' It is probably a legend that he used to take his hat off when, in lecture, he had occasion to name Bernays; but I can hear the tones of his voice when he invoked the authority, or appealed to the example, of Erasmus, or Bentley, or Gibbon.

Johnson has been reported as saying that 'the happiest conversation is that of which nothing is distinctly remembered, but a general effect of pleasing impression'. I comfort myself, in the face of my poverty of recollection, with an impression, as rich as it is doubtless incommunicable, of my old friend's wit and wisdom, his courtesy and kindness. He was an admirable host; exacting only in the

attention invited to his cellar and his cigars, and in the inordinate hours at which one was expected still to converse, or at least to listen. It was difficult to resist that glass of claret which wasn't a dinner claret but an after-dinner claret ; and I have a shameful memory of being once caught in a yawn, and politely escorted to my candle, at about half-past one. When I dined with him last he had been very ill ; his servant met me with an anxious face, and a request that I would not keep him up. He looked old and frail, and was unusually silent ; but over the second glass of port—the doctors were building him up—he began to mend ; and when the second cigar had been smoked the flame of discourse was burning with its old mild radiance. He would not speak of the war ; I think he already knew he should not see its end. But the recent publication of a volume of Professor Oman's *History* evoked his interest in the great days of the Peninsula ; and I heard for the last time the old stories of San Sebastian and Salamanca.

The graces of civilization and the delights of learning are far from me now. But my nomadic and semi-barbarous existence is still solaced by a few good books ; and the best odes of Horace, the best things in Boswell or Elia, often awake memories of Attic nights. Memories and visions, in which gleaming mahogany and old morocco are seen

darkling in a haze of smoke, and an old man in his big chair by the fire draws forth, for my pleasure and his, the hoarded treasures of his rich old mind.

SNEVCE.

October 1917.

PROPER NAMES in POETRY

WE have all indulged ourselves with the idle speculation of what one book we should wish to see salved from a literary holocaust or marooned on our desert island with the bags of rice and the kegs of gunpowder. I know a professor whose solution is a *History of Greek Syntax*, pure science for intellectual grist and precious scraps of quotation for spiritual savour. I have played with the fancy as often as most; but when the opportunity of trial came, set sail with nothing more satisfying than the *Field Service Pocket Book*, which weighs $6\frac{1}{2}$ ounces and is an authorized molecule of the 35 lb. to which a subaltern's baggage is well known to be restricted. It is an admirable compendium, closely printed on thin paper; I soon wished for variety. For months I subsisted on newspapers in languages I imperfectly understood,

and on a flotsam of novels washed up by the Aegean or purchased of the *librairie française, rue Venezelos* ; and was hardly conscious of any craving for better fare till luck brought me the Poet Laureate's *Spirit of Man.* Its candid covers are soiled now to the hue of our tunics, and its leaves probably smell of stables and stale tobacco ; but every printed line is precious. If there be still any Gentlemen of England who sit at home in ease, and hop like elderly sparrows from shelf to shelf of their well-appointed libraries, tell them they do not know what a Book can be.

With my Book before me, and making the most of an ill-stored memory, I beguile my tedium with pleasant speculations. For the Book has—as its compiler all too modestly claims—'a secondary usefulness in providing material for the exercise of literary judgment, in those who have any taste for the practice'. My taste inclines me to subtleties of rhythm and language ; to-day I desire to know, particularly, wherein resides the literary magic of proper names, and especially of the names of places. The *Vallombrosa* passage is a *locus classicus* ; and the Book supplies me with another great example :

> flies toward the Springs
> Of *Ganges* or *Hydaspes, Indian* streams ;
> But in his way lights on the barren plaines

Of *Sericana*, where *Chineses* drive
With Sails and Wind thir canie Waggons light.

These are jewels of a far country, and perhaps owe their lustre to the mere contrast with their more familiar settings. But there may be more behind. I remember how my childish imagination was stirred by

Hark, the cry is Astur,
And lo, the ranks divide,
And the great lord of Luna
Comes with his stately stride.

But I never asked where Luna was nor what manner of city it might be. A place-name may mean anything or nothing; and so, if it be sonorous, we let it lead our fancy captive into the land of Romance. Stevenson, who had the true gift of travel, tells us he loved a map, not as a diagram of tours projected or imagined, but for the rich ore of its names. He has followed his bent with a rare audacity in that well-known passage, where he opens the window on barbarous or degraded man by observing the Red Indian,

by camp-fires in *Assiniboia*, the snow powdering his shoulders, the wind plucking his blanket, as he sits, passing the ceremonial calumet and uttering his grave opinions like a Roman senator.

The association, it should seem, must be vague. Winchester and Shaftesbury, Beverley and Richmond are dear to all our hearts; but we do not seek to coin poetry from our love; or if we

do, Macaulay's *Armada* may suggest that we shall probably fail. Tennyson judged ill when he

> stood upon the bridge at Coventry.

Many English names, for one reason, sit awkwardly in a metrical framework; as *Stow-on-the-Wold*, or *Sutton Courtney*, or *Temple Bar*. Prose, with its wider range and laxer rhythms, can wrest romance from such as these, or from the commonest and least melodious vocables. I think of Stevenson again; of David Balfour on the brig *Covenant* of Dysart, at the mercy of the three ruffians Hoseason, Shuan, and Riach; saved by a deliverer from the *Appin* country; gazing, as the mists parted, upon 'the great stone hills of *Skye*'.

Turning again the pages of *The Spirit of Man* I cannot but conclude that poetry must go abroad for this piece of her pageantry. 'Lap me in soft *Lydian* airs'—'In *Tempe* or the dales of *Arcady*'—'Silent upon a peak in *Darien*'—'Singing of Mount *Abora*'—'Blind *Thamyris* and blind *Maeonides*'. I have hunted conscientiously for a contradictory instance, and have failed to find one. 'I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy' leaves me more than cold; and 'O that I were where Helen lies, On fair Kirconnell lea!' owes little to *Kirconnell*.

If our native place-names are intractable, the names of persons are even less propitious. Some

are precluded by positive cacophony—Matthew Arnold's 'Stiggins, Higginbottom, Wragg'. Many are merely unmelodious, pedestrian, and plain; *John Keats* is a theme for burlesque. But the Muse seems strangely shy even of *Milton* and *Shakespeare*, *Marlborough* and *Chatham*. Such names may indeed be introduced, without fiasco, if they are essential to a poet's meaning:

> Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.
>
> With this key
> Shakespeare unlocked his heart.

But they seem at the best to be carried off by the dignity and interest of the thought; seldom to lend any added grace of their own So it is no needless convention or affectation of classicism that has given us *Lycidas* and *Adonais*, or all the *Julias*, *Lydias*, and *Cynthias* who in our amorous poetry stand for the Marys and Elizabeths of real love.

One homely name, indeed, Poetry may boldly invoke. *Scotland* is full as stern and wild as *Caledonia*, and surely more moving. *England* is a holy name; thrice sacred now to Poetry, when poets have died in sanctifying her name.

The foreign name should not be difficult, nor too outlandish. Shelley, in the poem so entitled, names *Mont Blanc*; but

> piercing the infinite sky
> *Mont Blanc* appears

is impossible in English verse. Keats, bidding us

> Stop and consider! Life is but a day;
> A fragile dewdrop on its perilous way,
> From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep
> While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
> Of Montmorenci

brings his poor Indian to shipwreck in a monstrous bathos. And although the ore is precious, the vein may be overworked. Milton, Marlowe, and the late Sir Edwin Arnold, play the trick too often; repetition dulls the edge of fancy, and we lose ourselves in a vacant sonority.

MIHALOVA.

December 1916.

On RHYME

SO we may still spell it. The philologists have turned the tables on their predecessors, and dethroned the usurper *rime*. My unconscionable Toryism rejoices in such a peripety more than it would to see the House of Lords restored to the plenitude of its powers. I have forgotten by what argument the restoration was effected; but if you

will consult the Oxford Dictionary, you will find that I am right. I am glad to be right; but in this matter I should have been content to be wrong. *Rime* is cold and mechanical; *rhyme*, to my eye, would always be better than reason.

I am no prosodist. Professor Saintsbury's *History of Prosody* is for me a treasure in store. So is the *Englische Metrik* of the late Hofrath Dr. J. von Schipper of the University of Vienna, which has been translated into English—*fas est et ab hoste doceri*—and published by the Clarendon Press. But I am an amateur of metrical niceties, and a devoted lover of rhyme, and may perhaps hope to make good by zeal what I lack in learning. Most readers of poetry, I suppose, do not stop to weigh the values of rhyme. They take their rhymes as a due, and think nothing of the poet's travail in fitting his inspiration to so exigent a framework. Let them try their own hand at verse-making, and they will know better.

Our modern inability, in general, to do without rhyme has exercised critics, some few of whom have roundly denied the premiss. But the poets themselves, though they may often writhe under the lash, are too wise to attempt disobedience. The unwisdom of revolt is known by its fruits; how many of them can write blank verse?

A French critic of the eighteenth century laid it

down as an axiom that *la rime fait la plus grande beauté du vers*. The practice of our own eighteenth-century poets shows that they faithfully subscribed to the doctrine. There is a piece of ritual, unhappily discontinued, which reveals the true believer. In the old editions of these poets a marginal *brace*, or bracket, marks the licence of the triplet. This, we must suppose, was designed to warn the reader, lest he prematurely attune his expectation to a fresh couplet. Earlier and later poets, rioting in *enjambement* and other cunning irregularities, reduce the ornament of rhyme to a lower key.

This prominence of rhyme varies greatly in different ages, in different poets, and in different forms of verse. Rhyme is more prominent in couplets, and wherever following lines rhyme, than in alternating or otherwise complicated forms. But the couplet itself, in modern hands, may be so treated as to break regularity, and keep monotony at bay. Without such artifice the rhyme will sooner or later thrust itself too closely on the attention, and the verse will stiffen out of life as surely as if the metrical scheme is too rigidly kept. Versification is compact of concession, compromise, adjustment ; without these dexterities metre is a tiresome singsong, rhyme a gratuitous jingle, a damnable iteration. By their aid

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases, it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

By Shakespeare I think the couplet is never long maintained. The couplets with which he winds up a scene often strike cold upon our ear; and I will even confess I have felt the same disappointment in the closing couplet of the Sonnets. But couplets introduced in the course of blank verse may come with an exquisite sweet surprise:

That strain again! It had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour. Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.

I can think of no clearer example of the sheer beauty of rhyme than Olivia's lovely invocation, in the same play:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth and everything,
I love thee so, that maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.
Do not extort my reasons from this clause,
For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause;
But rather reason thus with reason fetter,
Love sought is good, but giv'n unsought is better.

In the *Sonnets* there is almost always a natural pause (and, in the original edition, a comma) at the

end of the line. Alternating verse, as I have said, stands this better than the couplet will ; yet I think that the music of the *Sonnets* would not escape monotony if it were not for the incomparable vocalization, the infinite variety, the perfect grace of the line itself.

> Then of thy beauty do I question make,
> That thou among the wastes of time must go,
> Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
> And die as fast as they see others grow.

The cardinal vice of rhyme is to make itself too easily or too loudly heard. If you find yourself regularly hearkening for it, you may know it has abused its powers. Some sense of such abuse impairs my enjoyment of Gray's *Elegy*, for all its tender modulation. In a short poem this danger is easily enough avoided ; a long poem, or uniform series of poems, can escape it only by deliberate artifice. By the same rule, the shorter the line the greater the peril. Even *L'Allegro* palls upon my ear.

The age of Shakespeare and Milton produced a type of rhymed verse very different from theirs. This has no smooth, involved melody, no linked sweetness long drawn out, but moves with a slow syllabic beat, like the measured tramp of marching soldiery. Two lines of Spenser—unlike his usual manner—are typical of the style :

Open the temple gates unto my love;
Open them wide that she may enter in.

Donne is the master in this kind. But it has nowhere reached a higher achievement than in Shirley's dirge of mortality:

The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings;
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

I find something of the same measured and emphatic utterance, the same sober ecstasy of rhythm, in a very different poem, Wordsworth's *Ode*:

Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended.

In these rhymes there is no reticence; they ring like a challenge. Yet they do not impair the balance of the verse, because the ear is sufficiently pre-occupied by the strong stresses and marked pauses of the rhythm. Nevertheless, the style is one that could not be for long sustained.

In a poem of any length there are two ways in which the beauties of rhyme may be given full play and its tendency to encroachment, and resulting monotony, be kept in check. The first is such variety in the rhymes themselves, and manipulation of the accents and pauses of the verse, as we see in the modern use of the heroic couplet. The second is the use of a more complicated rhyme scheme ; and this may be either irregular, or one of the received stanza forms. Of such irregular rhymed verse *Lycidas* is a classic example ; *Kubla Khan* another.

> And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
> It flung up momently the sacred river.
> Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
> Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
> Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
> And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean :
> And mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
> Ancestral voices prophesying war !

In both poems the sequence of rhymes is constantly changed, and the variety which this gives is enhanced by variation of the metre itself :

> But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
> Now thou art gone, and never must return !
> Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
> With wilde thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
> And all their echoes, mourn.

Another device is to mix blank with rhyming lines : Fitzgerald's quatrain is a happy example.

I confess that with the more complex set forms—as the Spenserian stanza and the Italian sonnet—I am not always perfectly at home. I sometimes lose the thread and have to resort to the algebraic symbols of the text-books. The poet himself I must believe superior to the need of *a b b a*. I was born dumb, and must not pretend to any knowledge of a poet's mental processes. Otherwise it would be interesting to speculate on the lapses from rhyme, of which poets have been convicted. Spenser had his tune by heart if ever poet had; yet he not seldom fails to rhyme. There is an ingenious excursus on this subject in the Clarendon Press Spenser. Almost always, if I am not mistaken, one of the words that should rhyme can be replaced by a synonym that does rhyme. This need not mean that Spenser changed his mind, but forgot to change his manuscript. His ear might be deceived by association. There is a similar place in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*:

> The painful warrior famoused for worth,
> After a thousand victories once foil'd,
> Is from the book of honour rased quite,
> And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd.

The probable correction *fight* for *worth* has been so generally accepted that it passes for Shakespeare's. But Shakespeare may have meant to write *rased forth*. Or he might be incurious.

I have a passion for irregularities and imperfections of rhyme—'soft irregularities', Meredith says of one of the fairest of his women, 'that run to rarities of beauty'. The rhyme which is, I think, called *feminine*—that in which the rhyming syllable is the penultimate—is hardly an irregularity, but in English it is a rarity. It should not be made the rule of a poem, as it is in *The Burial of Sir John Moore*; which, whatever be its merits, is a metrical failure. Used with art, its gentle cadence will chime most happily with the poet's mood, or the changing colours of his picture.

> All the bright company of Heaven
> Hold him in their high comradeship,
> The Dog-star, and the Sisters Seven,
> Orion's Belt and sworded hip.
> The woodland trees that stand together,
> They stand to him each one a friend;
> They gently speak in the windy weather;
> They guide to valley and ridge's end.

Sometimes the pair of syllables which make up the line-ending belong to separate words. This is a bold venture, unless the second word be an enclitic, as in

> Could I revive within me
> Her symphony and song,
> To such a deep delight 'twould win me, &c.

But no one can doubt its felicity in

> The Springtime, the only pretty ring time;

and I think it is justified by success in this of Rupert Brooke :

Oh ! we who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there 's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Nought broken save this body, lost but breath ;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending ;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

The *weak* rhyme, in which one of the rhyming syllables is unaccented, is naturally common at all times. Its conscious use for variety's sake is perhaps modern.

Two strangers meeting at a festival ;
Two lovers whispering by an orchard wall ;

and

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides

show the weak rhyme at its happiest. Shelley's

All the wide world beside us
Show like multitudinous
Puppets passing from a scene

asks too much of the accommodating ear.

False rhymes, which should rather be called imperfect or partial, are I know a stumbling-block to many. To me their imperfection has its own charm. At church, as a boy, I was offended by the illogical convention which alters the pronunciation of *wind* to accommodate it to *mind* and *kind*. I suspect that reviewers who castigate each new

volume of verse for its indulgence in false rhymes have not noticed how lax is the practice of the masters. What would they say to—

> A damsel with a dulcimer
> In a vision once I saw:
> It was an Abyssinian maid
> And on her dulcimer she play'd,
> Singing of Mount Abora.

There is no doubt that *dulcimer*, *saw*, and *Abora* are intended as rhyming.

> Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,
> Star-inwrought!
> Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
> Kiss her until she be wearied out.

I will have none of the doctrine that these are licences which may be conceded to the great, but which it were dangerous to imitate. They have their own beauty and propriety, and the fruit is on the tree for any who have the courage and the wit to gather it.

A controversy raged some years ago, in the columns of the *Saturday Review*, on the legitimacy of rhyming *port* with *thought*. The vials of wrath flowed as freely as if the object had been a split infinitive; but it seemed to me that most of the criticism was beside the mark, and that this is really a social not a poetical question. *Port* and *thought* are in Southern speech perfect rhymes, and to the

unsophisticated Southern rhymester will come trippingly on the tongue. Northern and trans-oceanic ears will no doubt be justly offended ; but if a poet chooses to limit his public, that is his and his publisher's affair.

Rhymes which to my thinking need no apology are sometimes defended or excused as rhyming *to the eye*. This is a plea in justification which I cannot admit, nor readily forgive. When I read poetry, poetry which pleases or moves me—and if it do neither I had rather be skimming the daily paper—I read with my ears open. If I am alone, or sure of my audience, I read aloud ; if not, I declaim imaginatively, as a musician reads a score. Surely I am in the right. Are we the slaves of print, that we should pretend to measure poetry with a glance of the eye and catch its harmonies at second hand by some interpretative trick of vision ? *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo* ; when we listen to the authentic voice of poetry we are present at a high festival, at a solemn music. By the ear only can its melody pierce the soul.

KALINOVA. *December* 1916.

READING ALOUD

I LIKE to speculate upon forgotten arts. I read recently, in an account of the Oxford *Almanacks*, the phrase 'when engraving became impossible'. What a hint for the fancy! I think of the unique depository of a splendid tradition of skill; a man proud, poor, and honest; living with his knowledge that never more will man scratch cunningly on steel or copper; eyeing with a contemptuous tolerance the poor prettiness of modern photographic process; as the last of the calligraphers regarded the mechanical vulgarity of print. There might be two, if you like; indeed I seem to have read some story of two brothers.

My imagination has busied itself with a family in Norfolk, of which I have heard as still extant, but on the brink of dissolution—the *Brandon Knappers*, whose peculiar hereditary skill in squaring the round flint made them for centuries eminent.

Here in Macedonia, where domestic needs are satisfied by the Expeditionary Force Canteen, and the delight of the eye is served by cuttings from *La Vie Parisienne*, one of my greatest pleasures has been to spend an hour in looking at C——'s coins. C—— is a man of taste and learning, has

the gift of tongues, and is moreover a policeman ; but I suspect him of a genius for acquisition. He seems to have appropriated every ancient coin that has been dug up since we came to Macedonia. They are very beautiful ; and with my pleasure in their beauty mingles a morose satisfaction when I contrast their lovely contours with the pitiful scratches of the modern drachma, franc, or shilling.

In antiquity, when books were few and the art of reading them a rare and difficult accomplishment, to read was ordinarily to read aloud. What we call 'reading' is called in Greek 'reading to oneself'. The invention of print, commas and other aids to understanding, increased the practice of solitary reading ; and reading aloud became gradually an accessory, but remained an important art. A hundred years ago it was still a social duty, comparable with carving or dancing. If two people were left alone with time on their hands, it was natural for one of them to read for the other's amusement. Nowadays, reading aloud is little more than a concession to tender years or failing eyesight. We think it a necessary evil. Books are now printed with large type to suit young eyes ; and even blind people claim their independence.

The loss, and not to children only, is great. Reading by the eye is a short cut to the sense of

what is read. It reaches its extreme in the pleasant process of skipping, which takes no account of a writer's manner, and turns a novel into a telegram. But the Complete Reader is concerned not with mere sense only, but with

> true concord of well tunèd sounds.

He who cannot read aloud intelligibly should be suspected of imperfect assimilation when he reads alone. *Elia* remarks of Shakespeare and Milton, that 'these two poets you cannot avoid reading aloud'. I go further, and confess that all poetry, and all good prose, invite me to utterance. I hope I do not sit muttering in public places; but if I cannot give voice, my ear hearkens to unheard melodies. This pleasure has its attendant pain. I have heard a lady of taste lament that she cannot read the newspaper, because she 'hears the horrid jargon in her head'. But I believe that she and I are exceptional, and that most readers are deaf. I have known professional students of literature, who when put to the test of declamation betrayed that the metre of *Paradise Lost* meant no more to them than counterpoint means to me. I suspect that most schoolboys read the Odes of Horace as if they were prose; moving about in worlds not realized.

I am persuaded that this conspiracy of silence has much to answer for in the general decay of

writing and the false notions of style now commonly entertained. Style is a quality of the structure and rhythm of sentences, of their clarity and harmony; only in a minor degree is it a matter of ornament or flourish. People who read by the eye alone must be impervious to these essential effects of style; their attention can be arrested only by strange words or uncommon images. Hence style has come to be regarded not as what it is, an inseparable quality of prose—so that all prose is bad which is not good—but as a special accomplishment, a superadded grace. From this it is a short step to that other view of many plain men, that all fine writing is a useless affectation. Englishmen, when they sit down to a report, or a leading article, or a scientific treatise, seldom feel under any obligation to study propriety of diction. If they are studious to split no infinitive, and call no man their mutual friend, they have made their bow to the Muses, and may get on with their job in plain English. It is not plain English—that rare and beautiful thing. It is a heap of worn phrases, tiresome circumlocutions, unnecessary discords. But no one knows or cares. It was not always so. In the eighteenth century all who wrote a book, or even a letter, tried to write it with propriety and elegance; and for the most part succeeded. Johnson could claim, in 1778, that

'nobody now talks much of style: everybody composes pretty well'.

Perhaps I overstate my case. It is of course true that good writing consists in the choice of words, and that the associations and suggestions of words, apart from their bare meaning, are often independent of their sound; arising in part, for instance, from the way they are spelled. But it is also true that the best chosen words will not make a good sentence, unless they are 'by unions married' in euphonious wedlock. Of that the ear must judge.

It is interesting to notice how the infection has reacted on spoken English. The children of the upper classes, though they are not taught to read or write, are, by the force of example, taught to speak English sufficient for the common occasions of life; and speak it very well. As soon as they have something to say which is outside their usual range, they talk like the books they read. (If I talk to them like the books I read, I find I can make myself understood; but I am considered an odd creature.) People of less education are not taught even to speak the language; their English, on all topics, is that of the local paper.

Reading as a social art survives in recitation—reading, as it were, without book. This is an odious practice, particularly in the young; I never

know whom to pity most, myself or the performer ; who having no legitimate occupation for his hands is reduced to absurd gesticulation. Acting is one thing, reading quite another. In part-reading, which admits of study and rehearsal, an approach to the histrionic manner may be allowed ; but a single reader, who may have to personate all ages and both sexes, must eschew versatility ; it is safer to risk monotony than to suggest the antics of a ventriloquist.

Elia preferred to read aloud alone, or 'to some single person listening. More than one—and it degenerates into an audience.' I often read aloud, and oftener declaim from memory, if I am sure I am unheard. An ode of Horace lightens the labour of dressing ; and on long marches, or quiet nights at an observation post, I have soothed the aching hours with this harmless anodyne. But all pleasures are better shared. I know no greater luxury, when I have made a find, than to encounter a sympathetic listener to whom I may communicate the thrill. One is best ; but I like the sound of my own voice well enough to be willing to read to two or three, if I am suitably pressed.

When we read as fast as the eye can travel, I do not think we get the pleasure or profit that we might. The speaking pace is the true pace for degustation. Opportunities for testing this are

rare ; but my recollections confirm the impression. The *Life of Apollonius* is endeared to me by the memory of a winter afternoon, when a friend read to me out of his translation ; and I recall a series of summer evenings in Perthshire, when a lady read *Persuasion* to admiration. As a child I read and re-read my favourite books ; but my greatest pleasure was in the books that were read to me. It was my mother's habit to read *Guy Mannering* at Christmas, as often as there was a fresh child of an age to enjoy it. The book was traditionally closed, and the breathless listeners sent to bed, at the point where the sound of carriage wheels breaks the suspense of Colonel Mannering and his expectant guests. Sleep seemed impossible.

Elia says that 'books of quick interest, that hurry on for incidents, are for the eye to glide over only. It will not do to read them out.' If the audience is adult, I agree. I do not think I should now care to listen to *Ivanhoe*, or even to *Vanity Fair*. Reading aloud is moreover a very stiff test. I have read *Framley Parsonage* a dozen times, and like it better on each reading. But when I tried once to read it aloud, I found it would not do. The style is too pedestrian, and the book altogether too *naïf*. Henry James, now, is excellent material ; and gains, I think, in lucidity, if read by a skilful reader who knows what is coming.

Reading, like every art, is capable of misuse. It is not impossible for a skilful reader to make bad writing seem like good. The most gullible of this sophist's victims is himself. Very ordinary stuff will charm your ear, if you declaim it before the fit has cooled. A week later, and it may seem to have strangely lost its savour.

It is a quality of the best writing, that you can hardly read it ill.

> Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?

The words have only to be spoken, and the air is full of their melody. Our noblest prose is equally unequivocal, and, like Shakespeare's verse, demands the tribute of utterance.

> Men fear Death as Children fear to go in the Dark.—I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue.—The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with *Love*, and found him a native of the rocks.

Such sentences as these were not made for the eye to glide over. They must be spoken to be heard.

BRALO. *March* 1918.

OLD BOOKS and MODERN REPRINTS

THE collector of first editions has been often held up to ridicule, and has sometimes deserved it. It is surprising that any man should think it worth his while to amass volumes of forgotten verse which have no merit but their rarity and have become scarce because no one cared to preserve them. The collector of postage stamps is a humanist by comparison. Even those whose wealth enables them to fly at higher game, have no better title to respect if mere rarity be their lure. Theirs is a petty ambition, which the dignity and beauty of their quarry serves only to blacken. They are unworthy custodians, swine among their pearls.

Yet the cult of the first edition, worthily pursued, is not a superstition. Even among contemporary editions the first is justly esteemed the most precious. For a practical reason, it is almost always the most correct. The first is the only edition of which it is likely that the author read the proofs with any diligence. Before the eighteenth century, indeed, it seems that an author was hardly expected to read proofs. Ben Jonson was careful about proofs; and Burton poked his old nose into the Sheldonian Theatre and tinkered with the sheets on the press.

But theirs was exceptional particularity. In default of a diligent author, however, the bookseller or the master-printer would look to the matter. You cannot print from manuscript without a corrector ; and a sense of responsibility somewhere, even in early days of laxity, is evinced by many a list of *Faults escaped in the printing* addressed with anxious apology to the reader's indulgence. A second edition was usually a mere reprint, in which fresh errors were added and those of the first repeated, or mended without intelligence. Those who have made it their business to reconstitute the texts of English classics know that the history of a text is the gradual accretion of error. Then there are matters of sentiment, of illusion. The first edition is the very *imago* that first flattered its author's eye. The copy you extract—in your dreams—from its lurking-place on the sixpenny shelf may be the very *Religio Medici* which Sir Kenelm Digby sat up all night to confute ; or Boswell's copy of *Rasselas*, or the *Quarterly* reviewer's *Endymion*. Autograph-hunting is in general an ignoble sport ; but who could resist the magic of that inscription on a fly-leaf—*Francisci Rabelaesi et ejusdem amicorum* ?

That no old book is to be desired save that it may be read, would be a hard saying. There are books to be prized for the beauty of their woodcuts or engravings, for the splendour of their bindings,

or simply for the excellence of their print. The glories of the early presses, those *incunabula* which the bibliophile rates so high, are indeed hardly to be read. The best of them are the ancient classics, and these are not true *editiones principes*. Modern editions, founded upon manuscripts of more venerable antiquity, and embodying the labours of generations of scholars, furnish a better text and a fuller *apparatus*. And these early books, which are museum pieces if only for their rarity and age, are also beautiful in themselves with a beauty beyond the reach of later times. It is a melancholy and humiliating truth that the history of printing is a long decadence. Even in the mechanics of printing we cannot to-day surpass the pioneers of the fifteenth century. We cannot achieve a finer paper or a cleaner impression. Our best types are modelled on theirs ; and in the use of our tools, in all the rules of the art, we toil painfully in their wake. A great scholar and accomplished collector used to say that his study of early printing had cured him of the vulgar Radicalism of his youth. The early printers had the tradition of the scribes in their souls, and so the new art found its perfection at a spring. It has been in a slow decline for four centuries ; and the best that we can do now is to follow the old models, and adapt the old methods, with what intelligence we may command.

English printed books, even the earliest and best, are of far inferior workmanship. Certainly they have beauty ; but they were produced, for the most part, cheaply and hurriedly to satisfy a popular demand, and it would be extravagant to regard them as works of art. Their beauty is dependent upon their meaning and proper use. The Florentine Homer would be still a thing of price if Greek were a forgotten language ; the First Folio of Shakespeare, in a like case, would be no more than a curiosity. The first editions of old books are not, of course, to be thought of in the first place as specimens of the printing of their time ; they are historic documents, monuments. The Shakespeare quartos and the folio of 1623 are the title deeds of a national inheritance ; and if we never saw them our minds would still repose on their existence as the source and standard of our knowledge. But if books are considered as things to possess, as possible objects of private ambition, then early English books are not worthily to be won as such but by those who will read them. The value of an early edition, in this regard, is a matter of sentiment and of illusion. The sentimental claim is easily understood, even by those who do not feel it ; yet this sentiment is no more than a pleasant sauce to enjoyment. The element of illusion is at once more subtle and more integral

to the appreciation of literature. A professor of philosophy used to say that the importance of Locke is not to be estimated until you have read him in folio. Those who have once read *Pride and Prejudice* in three slim duodecimos, with a ha'porth of large type to the page, will not easily reconcile themselves to the inelegance of the modern reprint, close printed in one crowded volume.

Some elements of the *mise-en-scène* are of positive structural value. Spelling and punctuation—which are considered later—are of this kind. So is the use of italic for proper names. So is that arrangement of verse by which lines are indented in indication of the metre or the incidence of the rhyme. So is the division into volumes. You remember the theatricals in *Mansfield Park* and the scene of their tragic *dénouement* when Julia Bertram burst upon the rehearsers and, 'with a face all aghast, exclaimed "My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment."' That sentence closes the first volume. The reprinters, who, not knowing or not caring that a novel was written in three volumes just as much as a play in three acts, have swept away the boundary marks, have here deprived their author of a fine dramatic point.

There is another class of matters, of less moment certainly, which are yet contributory to the full historical illusion. The idiosyncrasies of an epoch

of printing are not, perhaps, in any very obvious relation to the writings of the period. Yet such a relation must exist, for these things are a part, if a small part, of contemporary history. Their absence will cause no great loss to the uninitiated; those who have learned to mark them, and to study their values, will never miss them without a sense of incongruity. These tricks and fashions of printing may be good or bad in themselves. The printers of the seventeenth century were often careless and slovenly, but they had beautiful type and used it with courage and an instinct for fitness. The close-set lines, the bold initials, the florid italic headlines all help to flatter the eye with a brave effect of gallantry. Some of the title-pages are a perpetual joy, as happy in their execution as in the ingenuous candour of their phrasing. 'THREE PROPER, and wittie, familiar Letters: lately passed betwene two Vniuersitie men: touching the Earth-quake in Aprill last, and our English refourmed Versifying. *With the Preface of a wellwiller to them both.* IMPRINTED AT LON-don, by H. Bynneman, dwelling in Thames streate, neere vnto Baynardes Castell. *Anno Domini.* 1580. *Cum gratia & priuilegio Regiæ Maiestatis*' —all elegantly spaced and displayed, and the whole framed in the most beautiful of the Elizabethan borders—with what better commendation could

a book be launched on the world? The early nineteenth-century printers—to take an extreme contrast—went to work in a very different fashion. Their 'new-faced' type is ill cut, angular, and awkward. A slender bulk of verse is made to fill two volumes by an intolerable deal of 'white' between the lines; the broad margins miss their effect by being falsely proportioned; the headlines, set in mean, diminutive capitals, infect the whole page with their poverty. The title-pages are often so meagrely worded as hardly to give the printer a chance of success. Typography cannot do much with 'Alastor. A poem.' But an Elizabethan printer would have sprawled his P O E M across the page in poster capitals; the Georgian narrows it to a pitiful pin-point of deprecation.

It may be thought that this comparison proves too much. If the first presentment of these writers is so unworthy, is it not a paradox to exalt it as the best? Should we not rather welcome the privilege of giving to Wordsworth and Shelley the best that modern printing can provide, and discard the early editions with the contumely they merit? This is not a matter for dogmatism, but many judges will prefer the contemporary setting. It is racy of its time, and not without its own charm. Incapable of the bold masculine freedoms of a robuster age, there is a demure and virginal grace in its timidity

which is perhaps not inconsonant with the genius of the romantic poets. There is a primness beneath their raptures, an ingenuous simplicity in their enlightenment, to which (a cynical fancy may imagine) the printer of 1820 supplies a silent commentary. He reminds us that the prophets had a foot on earth.

Not many years ago it would have seemed an extravagance of pedantry to plead that there is any virtue in the variable and obsolete spelling of old books, that could justify its retention in modern editions. Even the compiler of that notable work of vulgarization, the 'Oxford Book of English Verse', apologized for having been persuaded to allow Spenser and Milton their own orthography. We think differently now. The old intolerance was rooted in an unconscious belief that the spellings fixed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and preserved by the tenacious conservatism of compositors, have a monopoly of correctness. The threats of iconoclastic phoneticians and the plausible programmes of practical reformers have shaken our faith and sown the seeds of latitudinarianism. The present Poet Laureate, himself converted to a spelling more or less phonetic, has pleaded with witty eloquence for some variety, some element of licence, in the alphabet of the future. To minds thus uprooted from dogmatism it may seem no

¶ THREE PROPER, and wittie, familiar Letters: lately paſſed betvvene tvvo Vniuerſitie men: touching the Earthquake in Aprill laſt, and our Engliſh refourmed Verſifying.

With the Preface of a wellwiller to them both.



IMPRINTED AT LONdon, by H.Bynneman, dvvelling in Thames ſtreate, neere vnto Baynardes Caſtell.

Anno Domini. 1580.

Cum gratia & priuilegio Regiæ Maieſtatis

LYRICAL BALLADS,

WITH

A FEW OTHER POEMS.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. & A. ARCH, GRACECHURCH-STREET.

1798.

more than reasonable that Milton should be allowed his own spelling. That he, for one, would have resented any tampering is placed beyond doubt by that *erratum*, 'For *we* read *wee*'. It was a bad day for the Misses Milton when that lapse was detected. It shows us how the rash modernizer adventures his soul in uncharted perils—we should never have known of ourselves that the second *e* was vital.

We cannot suppose that the old writers in general cared much about spelling, or that the printer was faithful to his manuscript. There is reason to believe that the compositor charged less if he might spell as he pleased than if he were tied to his copy. In any case the compositor would be influenced by his copy. But the important thing is that the spelling of a first edition, if not faithful to the author's idiosyncrasies, is true to the general practice of the day.

If the public taste is on the road to acquiescence in old spelling, it is still obdurate against the old punctuation. Yet if the old spelling is an aid to the full appreciation of seventeenth-century prose and verse, it is not a paradox to say that the original punctuation is indispensable. Spelling, which appeals to the eye, is but indirectly influential, by virtue of association and suggestion ; punctuation is vital to structure and rhythm. Good

punctuation subserves rhythm and clarifies structure ; false punctuation impairs or destroys both. It was formerly assumed that the old punctuation was purely haphazard and chaotic ; an assumption improbable in itself and easily refuted by inquiry. The true doctrine has been set forth and illustrated in detail by Mr. Percy Simpson in his *Shakespearian Punctuation*. Mr. Simpson's skilful and laborious inductions have allowed him to detect the nicest subtleties where a less acute observer might have assumed a misprint, and to establish beyond cavil that Shakespeare's punctuation, on its own principles, was as reasonable, though by no means as stereotyped, as our own. From its greater flexibility and its deference to rhythm it is better suited to musical prose than the modern system, which is logical to a fault. Read a page of *Areopagitica* or *Religio Medici* aloud, in a modern repunctuated edition ; then read it in the first edition or a faithful reprint, letting the punctuation be your guide. The test will hardly fail to convince you. That old authors are careless of commas is very probable, but does not matter. The printer, if it is he we are to thank, had the tune in his head. If he made mistakes, as he often did, he should be corrected by his own rules, not by ours.

It is difficult to think without envy of our fortunate ancestors, who—*sua si bona norint*—

might buy for a song treasures that are now the exclusive privilege of wealth. They put down their guinea cheerfully for the latest novel, and passed unregarded books which now leave the houses of great noblemen for the less embarrassed patronage of some American Lucullus. There can be no room for envy when we think of the pioneers —of Pepys, or Malone, or of Elia's modest folios. But it is hard to read without a pang the essay on 'The Two Races of Men'. The poor aspirant of to-day is made to feel his insignificance. The great days of the book-hunter are over. His game is too jealously preserved. Values are now too well known, the trade too well organized. Yet even a poor man, if he has time to spend and wisdom to circumscribe his ambitions, may still find bargains, contemptible enough in a mercantile sense but precious to the eye of possession. A humble collector once found a second edition of *The Monastery* on the threepenny shelf, and the three shabby little volumes gave him more pleasure than the North's Plutarch which he bought in the ordinary way for more money than he could spare. Even the seventeenth edition of *In Memoriam*, a slim, faded Moxon which may be had for twopence, is not too lowly for notice ; and who knows but that a lucky day may yet discover the first? But even this humble pursuit supposes ample leisure. *The Monastery* cost its finder his

Saturday afternoon. Given time and industry, a real prize need not be despaired of. If you are ready to sift the contents of a thousand wheelbarrows you may still find a grain among the chaff, a jewel on the muck-heap. But to the poor man who is also a busy man this harmless outlet is denied, and his Sundays are embittered by a Barmecide's feast of second-hand catalogues. These anglers know when their fish rise best, and the catalogues always arrive on Saturday night or for Sunday's breakfast. It is beyond nature to leave them unread, or even to destroy them when they have done their work of upsetting the victim's peace of mind and induced a mood of irresolute cupidity which lasts till bed time. I have a friend who, wiser than I, disposes of catalogues as shaving paper, luxuriously reading one page while he wipes his razor on the next.

There is a second way in which the love of old books may be in a measure satisfied. Of the legion reprints of the present generation a proportion, increasing though still small, respect the spelling, the punctuation, and to some extent the printing of the archetypes. A still smaller number are executed in actual facsimile. Now a facsimile is a thing repugnant to the collector's mind. It appeals to none of his lower instincts, and leaves some of the finest unsatisfied ; and facsimile is too near to

forgery not to rouse the impulse of suspicion. Yet the prejudice is really unworthy. A facsimile, properly conceived, is no outrage on the unique dignity of the original, no attempt to make a rare thing common. We cannot have the originals—alas, they are too dear for our possessing—and a good facsimile serves many of the uses of the original and communicates many of its joys. Critics should be careful to insist that 'facsimile' be strictly construed. There is no safety but in complete fidelity, and a facsimile should reproduce its model not only word for word and comma for comma, but page for page, line for line, and catch-word for catchword. It is for this reason that photography has generally been preferred to type. A confiding public, aware of the fallibility of compositors, clung to the belief that photography cannot lie. That belief has been rudely shaken; but the possibilities of type-facsimile are hardly understood. Photography has its uses, but its results either fail of illusion or come too close to forgery. The Oxford facsimile of the First Folio, printed in collotype, is a noble book, but you can never forget it is a photograph. Other processes, free from this drawback, are open to the graver objections that they exaggerate the imperfections of their model and that their mechanical mimicry gives an uncomfortable impression of counterfeit.

Type makes no equivocal pretensions, and in some respects it can surpass the present state of the originals. For early books were often printed from worn type ; the impression is often blurred, and time and the binders have yellowed the paper and cropped the margins. A facsimile can repair these ravages and blemishes. The actual types of Shakespeare's time, or the moulds from which they were cast, still exist at Oxford, and perhaps elsewhere. The Oxford Press, by printing with the old types on paper made to the old recipe, has produced copies which give us all the brilliancy of an Elizabethan book when it was new.

These are works of useful piety which we cannot too much commend. Their reticence conceals editorial skill and learning, as it exhibits devout and painstaking workmanship. But whatever their usefulness, they can never dissipate the value of their originals or of originals less precious than theirs ; nor need their accessibility put the humblest collector out of conceit with his modest treasures. In the hierarchy of fine art a good drawing and even a good engraving claim precedence of the closest mechanical imitation of Raphael or Rembrandt ; and in the temple of good books the meanest of authentic relics has more honour than the most sumptuous monuments of commemorative piety. This is the catholic faith, of which

sympathetic criticism may explore the grounds, but which reposes securely upon the common sentiment of the lovers of old books. The man who has no feeling for old books because they are old lacks something of literature. Everything that is old yet still lives has a title to reverence, for it has been spared by Time the winnower, whose forbearance is a patent of nobility. But an old book has more than the dignity of age ; it has a piece of immortality as well. Since a book is not a disembodied spirit, but soul compact with clay, the gayest and most prosperous of new editions may suggest to a sensitive imagination an incongruity as of varnished decay, a hint of grave-clothes beneath the trappings. But the grace of an old book is vernal and autumnal. It is as old as the date on its title-page, and as young as the hour it was born. It has distilled from the homage of generations the incense it could draw, and has kept all the freshness of a budding flower.

Of both these secrets those who are worthy of them may partake. The volume which turns a sullen back to the idle gaze of indifference will glow with life in the sunshine of admiration and knowledge. To be blind or indifferent to those aids to understanding, which a first edition can lend, is to lose a link with the past. Even literature is subject to a slow decay ; our comprehension of dead writers must pierce a mist of ever-thickening gloom.

A book coeval with its author has a quality in common with his genius, and a history which is a pale analogue to the history of his fame. It is a slender bridge across the ages, a faint clue to the past. To the lover whose fingers thrill to the touch of old vellum, whose eye lights to the appeal of faded print, an old book will yield something of the treasure of its experience, something of the bloom of its youth.

KALINOVA.

February 1917.

The Textual Criticism of English Classics

IN the *Proposals for Printing the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare* Johnson wrote: 'To have a text corrupt in many places, and in many doubtful, is, among the authors that have written since the use of types, almost peculiar to *Shakespeare*. Most writers, by publishing their own works, prevent all various readings, and preclude all conjectural criticism.' Modern research has shown that books published by their authors are yet not immune from corruption; that Johnson

himself knew this is shown by his practice. When they were in Skye, Johnson handed Boswell the works of Sir George Mackenzie, and bade him discover an error in the text on the sixty-fifth page of the first volume. 'I was lucky enough to hit it at once. As the passage is printed, it is said that the devil answers *even* in *engines*. I corrected it to *ever* in *aenigmas*. "Sir (said he), you are a good critick. This would have been a great thing to do in the text of an ancient authour."'

The causes to which it is due that the text of Shakespeare is less certain than that of Sophocles are well known. They have, perhaps, never been better stated than by Johnson:

> Of the works of Shakespeare the condition has been far different; he sold them, not to be printed, but to be played. They were immediately copied for the actors, and multiplied by transcript after transcript, vitiated by the blunders of the penman, or changed by the affectation of the player . . .; and printed at last without the concurrence of the authour, without the consent of the proprietor, from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate parts written for the theatre; and thus thrust into the world surreptitiously and hastily, they suffered another depravation from the ignorance and negligence of the printers, as every man who knows the state of the press in that age will readily conceive.

Shakespeare's text seemed to the critics of the eighteenth century to be peculiar only from their neglect of his contemporaries. Most of his fellow-dramatists were in a similar plight. Ben Jonson

indeed saved his text from mutilation by himself preparing it for the press and by superintending the printing with laborious diligence; but his was a quite exceptional carefulness. Even writers who, unlike the dramatists, were at liberty to publish their works as soon as they were written, often preferred to circulate them in manuscript. Sidney had nothing to do with the printing of *Arcadia*; the publication of *The Passionate Pilgrim* was piratical; very few of Donne's poems were printed in his lifetime. Even those authors who deliberately published their works were at the mercy of printers to whom the method and regularity of the modern press were unknown. No proof was sent to the author. Mistakes were corrected, and fresh mistakes made, while the sheets were at the press. It is doubtful if any two copies of the First Folio are identical.

Conjectural emendation is not the first, but the last, duty of an editor; the first is to assemble and weigh the evidence. What Pope called 'the dull duty of an editor' has been greatly extended by modern diligence, which has found that copies of the same edition do not agree, and that varying texts abound in contemporary manuscript-books. As the accuracy of printing increased, and authors discovered a conscience, texts became less uncertain and an editor's path less perplexed; but variation

and error persist. Editors of Gray and Keats must consult the manuscripts ; editors of Wordsworth and Shelley must compare numerous editions.

It is generally accepted that the most authoritative edition is the last published in the author's lifetime. This is roughly true of books published in the last two centuries ; but what if the author revised only the first edition, or revised no edition ? Of the five editions of *The Shepheard's Calender*, each repeats the errors of its predecessors, and adds new errors of its own. Of the Shakespeare Folios, Johnson says, 'whoever has any . . . has all, excepting those diversities which mere reiteration of editions will produce'. The second edition of *The Faery Queene* contains changes which were certainly made by Spenser ; but the 'faults escaped in the printing', of which a list was printed in 1590, were repeated in 1596. Even the careful Boswell, with Malone to help him, allowed errors to appear in the third edition 'revised and corrected' of his *Tour to the Hebrides* from which the first is free. It is therefore never admissible to select one edition and neglect the rest, unless the edition judged to be authoritative is the first.

Sometimes editions differ so widely that the constitution of an eclectic text becomes difficult, if not impossible. The Vulgate Shakespeare has

been compiled from Quartos and Folio partly by selection, partly by conflation; and combines versions of the same scene, both of which may be Shakespearian, but which Shakespeare could never have intended to stand together. From such a problem some critics seek refuge by selecting one original and editing it as if it were unique. This is legitimate, but does not exhaust the duties of criticism. A Quarto and the Folio may give versions which, as a whole, it is impossible to reconcile or combine; yet if they contain passages substantially the same, the variations must be weighed. There is in Shakespeare a long sentence, which in the Folio is concluded by the words 'and in one purpose'. The text is defensible, though the sentence lacks a verb. The Quarto has 'end in one purpose'. It is now an editor's business to decide, not whether the Folio text is possible, but whether 'and' or 'end' is the more likely to be right. That Shakespeare wrote both at different times is possible—all things are possible—but is not probable; that a printer should confuse 'and' and 'end' is what happens on every page.

Donne is another author whose editors may be tempted to fly to this unitarian heresy. Most of his poems depend mainly upon the posthumous edition of 1633; but there are also many earlier

manuscripts, of inferior authority as a whole (they are not the poet's autograph); and the later editions, which, as they include new poems, are not mere reprints, present variants which do not always seem due either to negligence or to conjecture. Such readings must be considered when the edition of 1633 is corrupt or doubtful, as it often is. To take one edition and ignore the rest because that edition is the best is no more defensible than to use one manuscript only of an ancient author because it is in general the most faithful. Yet since Donne is a poet not only obscure but often wantonly perverse, the decision whether specious variations come from a good manuscript source or from the ingenuity or negligence of an editor or printer, will be always doubtful, and sometimes impossible. The text of 1633 we know to have been copied, however ill, from a good manuscript. The tendency to prefer the later and easier reading has given currency to versions which are not Donne, but Donne made smooth.

Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* was carefully corrected by the author for the second and third editions. The third is the edition which he himself cites in the *Life of Johnson*, and it is obviously authoritative. Dr. Birkbeck Hill accordingly discarded the first and second editions;

and in one place corrected a misprint by conjecture which he might have corrected by reference to the first edition. This is a vicious principle. When the variations between the first and third editions are examined in detail, it is found that, though a great majority of the changes are clearly Boswell's, some are certainly the printer's, and a few are doubtful. Johnson 'was very severe on a lady, whose name was mentioned. He said he would have her sent to St. Kilda.' (The reference was to another lady who actually had been marooned on St. Kilda, and who had been talked of the day before.) The third edition has 'would have sent her'. This is less probable in itself, and it is most unlikely that Boswell made the change. In another place the first edition has 'will be pleased', the second 'will be please', the third 'will please'. Our unitarians are here committed to the view that it is more probable that Boswell altered 'be pleased' to 'please' than that the printer of the third edition, finding 'be please' in his copy, corrected it by omitting 'be'. 'Of these trifles enough.'

The works of later writers were published under more favourable conditions than were Shakespeare's or Donne's, and leave less room for conjecture; but conjecture is never inadmissible, and emendations may sometimes be probable. Johnson's rule 'always to turn the old text on every side, and try

if there be any interstice, through which light can find its way', is sound ; and in a writer 'so licentious as Shakespeare' few emendations can ever be considered certain. Less irregular writers, though their text may be less corrupt, may sometimes be corrected with greater confidence. That the text should stand, if it can be made to yield a meaning, is not always true. In Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands* is this sentence : 'To disarm part of the Highlands, could give no reasonable occasion of complaint. Every Government must be allowed the power of taking away the treason that is lifted against it.' It cannot be said to be impossible that Johnson wrote this ; but when it is considered that the expression is awkward, and therefore not Johnsonian ; that the book contains some dozen palpable errors, all obviously due to a misreading of the manuscript which the author did not detect ; and that 'treaſon' in Johnson's handwriting is very close to 'weapon'— it becomes more probable that the text is wrong than that it is right.[1] In the same book we read : 'Voluntary solitude was the great art of propitiation, by which crimes were effaced and conscience was appeased.' Other writers might call solitude an art, but hardly Johnson ; 'act of propitiation'

[1] The writer had before him a copy of the first edition which lacked the *Errata*. This correction is there anticipated.

is a known formula, and the confusion of *r* and *c* was exceedingly common.[1] Even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries literature has been produced in conditions favourable to corruption. When Johnson wrote his *Rambler* the printer's devil was at the door and took the copy away as it was written. The present writer knows nothing of the text of the *Rambler*, except that in all editions 'temerity' for 'timidity', or 'timidity' for 'temerity' has made nonsense of one of Johnson's periods; but he should expect to find the original issue, at least, not free from error.

The most satisfactory emendation, though not the most gratifying to its author, is that in which not a letter is changed. Such is the ὂν καὶ μὴ ὄν which Bullen disinterred from 'oncaimion' (or some such Roman gibberish) in *Faustus*; the later editions made it 'œconomy'. Such is Macaulay's restoration to grammar of the first page of *Persuasion* by the alteration of a comma.

The present writer claims to have restored dramatic propriety to a place in *Pride and Prejudice*. In the second chapter the words 'When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?' appear at the end of a sentence spoken by Kitty Bennet. It is absurdly

[1] In Johnson's note on *Henry V*, III. v. 40, it is said that a catalogue of misspelt French names is unaltered 'since the sense of the authour is not afferted'. Read 'affected'.

improbable that Kitty should be in need of such information. But her father, who had spoken just before, doubtless was ignorant of the date, and he had a reason for wanting to know. The speech can be given to him by a change which is hardly a change; for the word 'when' begins a line, and will begin a new speech if it is shifted to the right by a fraction of an inch.

> Were it not better done, as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade
> Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?

As these lines are commonly read, there is an awkwardness (pedantically called a zeugma) in the collocation of 'sport with Amaryllis' and 'sport with the tangles'; neither 'sport' nor 'with' has quite the same shade of meaning in the two phrases. If 'with' be read to rhyme with 'scythe' (it is not necessary to write it 'withe') both sense and metre are improved.

The writer cannot refrain from quoting an *aperçu* of a learned friend, which is, he believes, still unpublished. There is a line in Marlowe, 'Our Pythagoras' Metempsychosis', which seems unmetrical. By supposing Marlowe to have pronounced Greek as it is pronounced in Greece today, and was often pronounced then, this critic produces a 'mighty line':

> Our Pythagóras' Metempsýchosis.

Emendations more temerarious than these will sometimes occur. Sweeping changes are not often worth hazarding, because in books printed when they were first written it is unlikely that the text of the first edition has been corrupted more than once. But in editing Shakespeare and his contemporaries 'conjectural criticism', says Johnson, 'demands more than humanity possesses'. Yet 'the peril must not be avoided, nor the difficulty refused'.

The credibility of an emendation must be judged by estimating the probability of the corruption assumed as well as the propriety of the change proposed. Sir Walter Raleigh somewhere says that the change from 'way of life' to 'may of life' 'makes Shakespeare write like Pope'. But is there anything very unlike Shakespeare in 'my *May* of life'? Sir Walter rightly holds that in Shakespeare anything that has a meaning should not be lightly changed. But when it is remembered that an italic *m* inverted is very like a *w*, and that turned letters are very common, the probability of the corruption is so great, and the change so slight, that the emendation deserves consideration. If it is bad in itself, *cadit quaestio*. It is *a priori* probable that corruptions exist in Shakespeare which have never been and will never be suspected, because the lost word has been supplanted by another which makes sense. There is nothing improbable

about 'Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself'. But when once 'sell' has been suggested, and the probability that 'sell' would be altered to 'self' is considered, it becomes difficult to be sure that 'self' is right. The late Professor Bywater used to say, 'I wish *I* had made that emendation'.

The practice of conjecture is pleasant, but like other pleasant things is dangerous. A commentator is apt to think that every line needs a note; Johnson said of Warburton that he 'had a rage for saying something when there was nothing to be said'. An emender is apt to acquire a rage for correcting when there is nothing to correct. Yet an editor is bound to satisfy himself that his text makes sense and grammar; and it is remarkable how the eye will mislead, and an inattentive mind acquiesce in imperfect meaning. Printers employ trained readers, because authors do not see small mistakes. They read the right word when the print has the wrong one. In reading Johnson's *Journey* the present aspirant three times missed the word 'reruined', because the catchword on the previous page had told him to expect 'required'. He would perhaps have acquiesced in 'treason' and 'art', if his vigilance had not been excited by 'thirteenth of August' when he knew from Boswell that it must be 'thirtieth'.

A useful and amusing exercise is to correct

a reprint of a book, the most careless that can be found, and compare the emendations with a sound text. Vanity will sometimes be hurt ; but sagacity will often be rewarded. The writer has seen the late Dr. Verrall's copies of *Jane Austen* (modern reprint) and compared his marginal suggestions with the original editions. Some of them seemed to be unnecessary ; of those which seemed probable, almost all were found to be the readings of the first edition.

The privilege of emendation has been too little exercised by modern editors of English classics ; but it is true that emendation is only a small part of their duties. The chief is restoration. In this pious work Johnson was a pioneer. 'In this modest industry I have not been unsuccessful. I have rescued many lines from the violations of temerity.' The editors of the later Folios, and such men as Rowe, confounded emendation with what Johnson justly calls adulteration. They 'regulated' the text to suit their own views of propriety and elegance. In lesser matters they made changes as a matter of routine. When they altered 'Enter the two Bishops' to 'Enter the two Archbishops' (because they were Canterbury and York), and 'exit' to 'exeunt', when more than one person left the stage, they did not know they were doing wrong. A witty scholar com-

menting on this last piece of pedantry remarked, 'We do not say, Smith and Jones made an *affidaverunt*'. We now know the Folio, carelessly printed as it is, to be much better than Johnson supposed: 'I considered the punctuation as wholly in my power'; we now know that it is in the main sound. Johnson thought it permissible to 'smoothe the cadence, or regulate the measure' by transpositions and omissions from which we now shrink. Even the rearrangement of the lines to suit the blank verse has been called in question. There is a place in *Macbeth* where, in the Folio, the lines as printed do not scan; but the famous directions, 'Knock, Knock, Knock' are disposed on the page with such striking dramatic effect that it is hard to believe the arrangement accidental. What if it should follow Shakespeare's autograph?

The petulance and self-conceit of editors have in the past been notorious. The controversies of scholars are still sometimes more acrimonious than the dignity of their subject should warrant. But the editor of to-day is of necessity a humbler person than his predecessors. In the criticism and exegesis of modern, and even of ancient, literature, most of the obscurities that admit of enlightenment, and most of the corruptions that admit of correction, have been explained or mended. There is still room for labour, but not much room for

fame. Yet the diligence of editors is still deserving of respect. To restore, and maintain in its integrity, the text of our great writers is a pious duty, and it is a surprisingly difficult task. An editor's business is to arrive at the truth, or as near it as he can; and to do this it is often necessary to spend time and labour on very small matters. 'To an editor', says Johnson, 'nothing is a trifle by which his authour is obscured.' It is often his misfortune that he cannot but seem to come between his author and the reader's enjoyment, by labouring on 'evanescent atoms'. Because he seems to magnify atoms he is not to be supposed unaware of their insignificance. It is true that good judges of literature often make very bad editors; but it is unfair to conclude that an editor who knows his business, and sticks to it, is insensible of higher matters. On this, as on so many topics of criticism, the 'Preface to Shakespeare' has the last word:

> The greater part of readers, instead of blaming us for passing trifles, will wonder that on mere trifles so much labour is expended, with such importance of debate, and such solemnity of diction. To these I answer with confidence, that they are judging of an art which they do not understand; yet cannot much reproach them with their ignorance, nor promise that they would become in general, by learning criticism, more useful, happier, or wiser.

Y4 (Smol Hill).
July 1918.

The ART of QUOTATION

PLATO is the first of ancient writers to use quotation freely in the modern allusive way. Other Greek writers quote the poets, or the Delphic oracle, in a forensic or didactic manner, to point a moral or enforce a doctrine ; as Cephalus, in the opening scene of *The Republic*, quotes Pindar as a climax to his dissertation. But Plato's own quotations come unsought ; he prefers a poet's words to his own simply because they are better, or because they occur. Somewhere he says ἕκτῃ δ' ἐν γενεᾷ, φησὶν Ὀρφεύς, καταπαύσατε κόσμον ἀοιδῆς, when he means no more than 'Sixthly'. Cicero's letters are full of quotations of the same kind, made *currente calamo*.

The tradition of classical quotation in modern literature has a double source. It derives partly from the reasonable veneration of antiquity which informed the Revival of Learning ; but it may also be connected with the ritual of the *sortes* and the mediaeval conception of the wizard Virgil. In the convention called Euphuism the argument from antiquity is as cogent, and as indispensable, as the argument from nature ; Pliny and the chameleon are of equal authority. Henry Peacham, in his *Compleat Gentleman*, is very full on this topic of the efficacy of ancient learning. He tells of one who

was cured of madness, or some grievous distemper, 'by onely reading of Quint. Curce'. In such writers quotation is not illustrative, but demonstrative. To say, with Johnson, that Burton's *Anatomy* is 'overloaded with quotation' is to prefer a charge which Burton would not have understood. It is like telling a barrister that he has too little argument and too much evidence.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries men still had the sense that in appealing to antiquity they were turning from the transitory to the permanent, from the disputable to the accepted. Jack Wilkes, who would say anything, said quotation was pedantic. *Johnson*: 'No, Sir, it is a good thing; there is community of mind in it. Classical quotation is the *parole* of literary men all over the world.' That the world has lost this *communis sensus* was doubtless a necessary result of the growth of the kingdom of knowledge; but it is a real loss to society. Two ex-Cabinet Ministers were recently heard to quote Greek at lunch; but this was among friends. To quote Horace in public, once a duty, is become an indecency. Even in learned societies and at convivial hours the sons of science raise their unlettered heads, and you quote Voltaire at your own risk. A letter-writer, or a writer to the *Literary Supplement*, who chooses or is chosen by his audience, may take more liberties; the reader's

blush of shame or scowl of resentment is at the worst a private emotion.

In the undress literature of 1820 quotation runs riot. Charles Lamb writes to a friend (about the friend's poem): 'There is a quotation in it, always bad in verse, seldom advisable in prose.' If this was his considered principle, he did not wear it out in practice. The *Essays of Elia* are full of quotations and half-quotations, reminiscences and echoes. In Hazlitt quotation becomes a disease; in the essay 'On Going a Journey' are at least twenty-nine quotations. Quoting for quoting's sake—the verse at the end of a sermon, the neat tail-piece of an article—is as bad as wilful punning. A quotation, like a pun, should come unsought, and then be welcomed only for some propriety or felicity justifying the intrusion. A writer who lets himself run on in borrowed phrases may be suspected of not writing from his own mind. Lamb, indeed, confessed that he had to let books do his thinking for him—'I cannot sit down and think'. But Lamb is a law neither to himself nor to others; he is the only individual of his species, and any dress becomes him.

Quotations range from depths of silliness—as when parrots call a thing 'small by degrees and beautifully less' when they mean that it is small—to rare heights of felicity. 'When a book is at

once both good and rare—when the individual is almost the species, and when *that* perishes,

> We know not where is that Promethean torch
> That can its light relumine—

such a book, for instance, as the Life of the Duke of Newcastle, by his Duchess—no casket is rich enough, no casing sufficiently durable, to honour and keep such a jewel.' The beauty of Lamb's quotation (flagrantly misquoted) lies in the graceful extravagance of fancy, which likens the beauty of a rare old book to the mortal loveliness of Desdemona. The quotation hints at more than it expresses. This kind of wit is most obvious when the quotation is made to carry a pun. The ancients did not consider a pun as degrading the dignity of poetry. When Cassandra in her frenzy invokes Apollo as Ἀπόλλων ἐμός, we know that she means Apollyon 'my destroyer'; and Aeschylus elsewhere in a splendid poem calls Helen of Troy ἑλέναυς, 'robber of navies'; of which Browning's 'Ships' Hell' is a travesty. Plato, our earliest grammarian, made no distinction between a pun and an etymology.

Punning is rare in serious modern verse; but by our earlier poets puns are made with a serious and even a mystical intention. It is impossible that the Dean of St. Paul's can have been innocent of a pun on his name when he wrote

> When thou hast *done*, Thou hast not *done*,
> For I have more.

And in the same poem—

> But swear by Thyself, that at my death thy Son
> Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore.

These lines are addressed 'to God the Father'; and in Donne's sermons the device is used again and again with the same solemnity.

> I shall rise from the dead, from the darke station, from the prostration, from the prosternation of death, and never misse the sunne, which shall then be put out, for I shall see the Sonne of God, the Sunne of glory, and shine myself, as that sunne shines.

The current notion that punning is necessarily inept is an affectation; puns are a legitimate form of wit, and the punning quotation may be very happy. When Wilkes on his acquittal was carried in triumph on the shoulders of the mob, Burke quoted what Horace says of Pindar:

> numerisque fertur
> lege solutus.

This, Reynolds said, was 'dignifying a pun'. A gentleman named Money was thought uxorious. A friend visiting him after an absence found the lady expectant and her husband more uxorious than ever; and reported to their common friends:

> Crescit amor Nummi quantum ipsa Pecunia crescit.

This was Dean Mansel's, and is good of its kind.

The habit of quoting other men's phrases to save trouble is one vice of writing. The opposite is the

use of quotation to deceive, or to dazzle by parade of learning. There are writers who drop into French (as the present writer may be suspected of dropping into Greek) with all the air of taking the intelligent reader into their confidence ; when they are well aware that few Englishmen read anything French except French novels. But that is sometimes a pardonable malice which introduces an allusion that will be taken by some readers at the expense of others. In a notable work on ancient Greek syntax the example given of the simple sentence is *τὸ παιδίον ἐβόα*, 'The baby was crying'. This is a wicked joke intended for the private ear of those who are familiar with the first oration of Lysias and remember the discreditable circumstances in which the child was left to cry. Here no one is insulted, and the writer and a few of his readers are innocently tickled.

But quips of this kind win more admiration than they deserve. They are foreign to the proper business of writing, and are at their best only occasionally permissible. The most apt and most pleasing quotation is, after all, that which comes unbidden and is too winning to be denied reception. Sir Walter Raleigh, in his *Johnson on Shakespeare*, mentions that Henri Beyle translated Johnson's remarks on the Unities and appropriated them as the manifesto of the young romantics : 'but he told

not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion'. This could not be bettered ; and it is as modest as it is felicitous. The writer has had a happy thought, and makes his readers free of it. He takes no credit to himself. An author who sits down to embellish his essay with a wealth of quotation and allusion, and to point it by verbal dexterities, forsakes his proper function, and forgoes the privilege of securing the reader's attention to what is his own.

On this, as on so many questions of literary propriety, the practice of Johnson is instructive. His capacious memory was full of literature. In classical quotation he was so ready as to hit off nine mottoes for the *Idler* in as many minutes. He said 'I love anecdote'. He often repeated whole poems to his friends or to himself. But when he expounds his own wisdom he is very sparing of quotation. He often, indeed, cites maxims of Roman law or scholastic philosophy—as *volenti non fit injuria* ; *exceptio probat regulam* ; *de minimis non curat lex* ; *dolus latet in universalibus*. But this is an appeal to authority, to the formulated wisdom of ages. Merely ornamental and allusive quotation he avoided ; he would not lessen himself, or insult his readers, by dressing his thoughts in borrowed finery. This is one of the austerities which have made it supposed that his writing is dull. It is not

often dull; but it is in a rare degree self-reliant and proud.

Ornamental quotation has always a theatrical quality, and is most in place upon public occasions. In days when literature was still at home in the theatre, the law courts, and the senate-house, a dramatic moment was sometimes embalmed in an apt quotation. Great statesmen vied with each other in the practice of the art, and were even so careful of their fame as to quote with their dying breath. Burke owed not a little of his reputation for genius to his powers of brilliant quotation, which in a man of less abundant fertility might be supposed the fruit of study. When Sir Joshua concluded the last of his discourses to the Royal Academy, his friend stepped forward, and taking the lecturer by the hand pronounced these lines:

> The Angel ended; and in Adam's ear
> So charming left his voice, that he a while
> Thought him still speaking, still stood fix'd to hear.

Much solemn nonsense has been talked and written about the sin of misquotation. Of course references should be verified for publication, and scholars and reviewers are right to set a high value on accuracy of citation. But it is the man who quotes without book whose reading has made him a full man. If Matthew Arnold, accused of misquoting Keats, really replied that he 'could not

believe it possible', he talked like a prig. Men of letters formerly quoted from memory, or adapted their originals to the purpose of the moment, without scruple and without fear of exposure. The polite correspondence of the eighteenth century is full of misquotations of Virgil and Milton. We now think it necessary to be shocked by every verbal inaccuracy. We send our quotations into the world forearmed by private verification ; and when other adventurers write a book, we turn to our reference shelves, not without expectation of disclosures.

The novelists and essayists of to-day often affect an elegant disdain of learning, and make 'professor' a term of abuse. Our writers of scientific treatises are for the most part innocent of any pretension to literature. Both parties are losers by this unfortunate separatism, which has split the republic of letters into factions. We have all smiled, with Lamb and Hazlitt, at the solemn person who supposed that by 'the two greatest names in English literature' must be meant Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke. But even Lamb, it will be remembered, did not dispute that these were the greatest *names*. The *Essay* and the *Principia* were, in fact, like *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and the *Dissertations on the Epistles of Phalaris*, and like the *Republic* and the *History of Animals*, considered as masterpieces of literature ; while poets and

pamphleteers were ambitious to be reputed men of learning. The distinction now often assumed to be absolute between science and literature, between information and entertainment, between knowledge and genius, was unknown to the authors of *Pantagruel* and *The Praise of Folly*. The false assumptions which underlie it have done much to make what should be serious literature, indigestible, and what should be amusing, frivolous.

Y 4.

August 1918.

Thoughts on SPELLING REFORM

I hope I may be allowed to recommend to those, whose thoughts have been perhaps employed too anxiously on verbal singularities, not to disturb, upon narrow views, or for minute propriety, the orthography of their fathers. . . . There is in constancy and stability a general and lasting advantage, which will always overbalance the slow improvement of gradual correction. Much less ought our written language to comply with the corruption of oral utterance, or copy that which every variation of time or place makes different from itself, and imitate those changes, which will again be changed, while imitation is employed in observing them.—JOHNSON.

I PROTEST I know little of phonetics ; much less, doubtless, than Mr. George Bernard Shaw, whose charming play *Pygmalion* and its preface have lately roused me to a mood of

contradiction. But thought is free; and if I do not know very much of phonetics, it happens that I have seen a great deal of phoneticians. In the way of my profession I have lent a patient ear to their controversies, and obtained, in unguarded moments, some knowledge of their darkest ambitions. I knew Sweet—a man of unmistakable genius—and many of his pupils. I knew the twin patriarchs of English philology, Skeat and Murray. I have listened with delight for hours together while Dr. R—— B—— and Professor C——k discoursed of ancient and modern numerous prose. And I acquired, with some information, and a deal of entertainment, a fixed impression—which *Pygmalion* has done nothing to dispel—that phoneticians are dangerous men. Pioneers are always likely to be iconoclasts; and phoneticians of the present generation—whose spiritual fathers cried in the wilderness—find themselves called to be the apostles of a popular movement. The people asking for a prophet say 'Thou art the Man'. As a thaumaturgist, the phonetician plays a part which our ignorance makes absurdly easy. He can make the most astonishing noises. He can tell us, with surprising accuracy, where we were born. He can prove to us that our notions of our own pronunciation are not only loose but often completely false. 'It is as easy as lying.'

Yet I demur to the common conclusion that we ought to set up the phoneticians as dictators how we shall speak. Pronunciation is not a matter of purely technical concern, but an intimate personal thing, a matter for pride and shame, admiration and anger. We dare not commit it to a Junta of Specialists, or any Academy of Chartered Libertines.

The phonetician, who as such is a man of science, enters the arena of practical politics chiefly as a Spelling Reformer. Now all spelling reformers I have quarrelled with make two assumptions, which are accepted by the mass of the interested public. In the first place it is assumed and admitted that the only function of written language is to represent the sounds of speech. In the second place it is assumed—but with less unanimity—that it is possible and desirable to erect a standard of speech, and to devise a convenient script which will represent it faithfully and intelligibly.

Of these two assumptions the first was never true, and to-day is less true than ever. A great part of a literate Englishman's vocabulary consists of words which he hardly ever hears or voices, and the sense of which is conveyed to his understanding mainly by ocular suggestion. Sir James Murray, at a conference of scientific men, noted six several pronunciations of the word *gaseous*. It really

matters very little how we pronounce *gaseous*; but the written word tells its story much better than would (say) *gayshus*.

Skeat, who was a moderate man, deplored our abandonment of the old phonetic forms *mist* and *kist*; but Dr. Henry Bradley—the cautious modesty of whose occasional utterances, on this as on other subjects, conceals their truly pontifical character—has pointed out that *missed* is in fact more directly significative than *mist*; for we all know what *-ed* means.[1] He has also pointed out that the evolution of pronunciation is not purely phonetic. *Criticism* is *kritik* plus *ism*, and is *kriticism* only in virtue of the law of the language that *c* is soft before *i*. If you make *kritisism* standard, you create a gratuitous anomaly.

It is worth while to consider some of the consequences that would flow from the establishment of a reformed spelling on a phonetic basis. It is often objected that it would create an obsolete 'old style', and put perennial obstacles in the path of all historical investigation. This type of objection is raised against all new models, and must be considered on its merits. It was no doubt worth while to adopt the Gregorian calendar,

[1] Spelling has functions more remote from phonetic representation. 'I always spell plumb-pudding with a *b*, p-l-u-m-*b*—I think it reads fatter and more suetty.' (Charles Lamb's *Letters*.)

though it operated to the confusion of historians. We ought, no doubt, to adopt the metric system of coinage, weights, and measures, and take the temporary confusion, and permanent complication, as part of the penalty of progress. Whether it would be worth while to adopt a duodecimal (or another) notation, so that posterity might divide 100 by 3 and leave no 'remainder', is probably very doubtful. I do not think this objection valid against phonetic spelling. It should be remembered that our modern uniform English spelling is barely two centuries old. The 'old style' would not offer insuperable obstacles to scholars; and for ordinary purposes Shakespeare would be reprinted.

The objection on the score of historical and etymological continuity is distinct, though similar, and is much graver. Personally I care little for Teutonic gutturals, and would cheerfully change *ought* and *thought* to *awt* and *thawt* to-morrow. But I cling tenaciously to the traditional forms derived from Greek and Latin. *Observation*, *adolescent*, *accretion*, *chryselephantine*, *hypotenuse*, and *ichthyophagous* carry us over a gulf of two thousand years at a jump. To alter the spelling (*kraizelifantain* or the like) would not only make it much more difficult to learn Greek and Latin (which most spelling reformers will regard as unimportant),

but would deprive most educated people of that knowledge of the origin of difficult and abstract words which is the best aid to the accurate use of language and the surest preservative against decay. *Chryselephantine* would become a *vox nihili*; for no one could spell *kraizelifantain* unless his phonetic memory retained the sound; no one knows how to pronounce the word (it is never pronounced) except by knowing that it is spelt *chryselephantine*. Words like *oedematous* and *parallelepiped* and *extravasated*, which are hardly part of the spoken language, furnish an effective *reductio ad absurdum*; but there are many more important elements of language which have a symbolic value independent of their phonetic value. *-ed* is *d* in *paused* and *t* in *passed*; but it always has the same significance to eye and mind. *Trans* has the same value whether it is *trans* (*transference*) or *tranz* (*translate*, so pronounced by some speakers).

One aspect of the same thing should appeal to all good Europeans, and even to practical men. All the languages which follow the Latin tradition preserve such a suffix as *-ation* in forms which are identical or readily identified. This identity is surely, for practical purposes, much more important than the phonetic divergences which it is said to obscure. English *nervous* = French *nerveux* is a very simple equation, which phonetic spelling

would reduce to a riddle. German botanists have found to their cost that *Sonnenpflanzen*, though ostensibly a reasonable word, has no international currency ; *Heliophytes* is universally intelligible, if it is spelled in the traditional manner. The noise is immaterial.

There are two things about phonetics which it is important to remember. One is that phonetics does not profess to describe articulate sounds as such (they seem to be not susceptible of scientific description) but classifies them according to the mechanism of their production. The second (which is a corollary of the first) is that the phonetician's best subject of research is his own organs. The only thing he can tell us with certainty is how he makes his own sounds. He is an introspective philo sopher, whose motto is *Nosce teipsum*. It follows that his is a purely natural science, in which

Whatever is, is right.

These facts raise in an acute form the question of the Standard. A standard phonetic spelling would represent a standard pronunciation. Shall the phoneticians then, who are the best representatives, teach us their own pronunciation ? God forbid. Phoneticians do not always speak the English that is most pleasing to my ear ; and I suspect that any phonetician is too sophisticated to be a trustworthy model. The standard,

if we are to have a standard, must be arrived at by comparison and approximation, the phoneticians acting as recorders and interpreters.

But this question of a standard is exceedingly thorny. Strictly speaking there is no such thing. No individual's speech is the same as any other's, and the individual himself is not a constant. I speak in one way when I am talking quietly across a table, and in quite another when I am trying to tell an overworked telephone that I want 'rashons for the twenti sekond for faiv ofisers and nain five other ranks' (the telephone, when tired, insists upon articulation and rejects slurs). Further—this is important and is constantly ignored—singular words have plural sounds. Sweet pointed out that no one sounds either the vowel or the *d* of *and* in *bread and butter* unless he means 'and don't forget the butter'. These things have been recognized by phoneticians, who have distinguished different 'stails' as suitable for public elocution, rapid conversation and so on. We stray in a maze of subjectivity.

Since it is plainly impossible to apply such variations as these to the ordinary written language, any standard must be highly generalized. But upon what data? 'It is impossible', writes Mr. Shaw, 'for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or

despise him.' The moral implied seems to be that we should choose some brand of English (which, if I know anything of Mr. Shaw's bias, will not be 'the vulgar dialect of the golf club') and impose it upon all comers. But this, as Mr. Shaw recognizes, is an imperial question as well as a class question. It is also a matter of provincial rivalries which evoke local patriotism as nothing else will. The phoneticians, compelled to narrow the field, usually plead for the recognition of 'educated South English' as a standard. They know not what they do. Will a Yorkshireman consent to rhyme *class* with *farce*, a Scot *port* with *thought*, an American the second syllable of *America* with *merry* instead of *furry*? As Mr. Shaw's Eliza says, Not bloody likely.

These are matters of intense local prejudice, which it would be folly to override. I, being an Englishman bred in Scotland, consider myself as catholic and tolerant. But I make a distinction in the vowel sounds of *my* and *mine*, *lied* and *slide*, which is common to all Scotsmen to whom I have appealed, and quite unknown to South Englishmen, most of whom are unable to detect any difference. But 'stail' is to me an abomination. To create a standard imperial English is impossible, and the attempt would be grossly illiberal.

Supposing, however, that educated South English

is the only raw material with which we have to deal, let us examine the consequences of an attempt to standardize it by phonetic script. This would mean putting ourselves into the hands of the phoneticians ; and phoneticians, as I have said, are dangerous men. This arises partly from their laudable devotion to their duty as natural scientists. Observing that at least fifty out of every hundred educated South Englishmen habitually say 'I sor im yesterday', the phonetician writes a paragraph : 'Epenthetic *r*. Many South English speakers insert an *r* to avoid hiatus in such combinations as "the idear of". Now at least forty-nine of the fifty are quite unconscious of this, and forty-eight would be very angry if you told them. Such lapses are best ignored. I have heard educated people speak of their *favers* and *muvvers*, and say *tlap* when they meant *clap*. These are probably passing phases, which will die out if they are not encouraged by official recognition. Therefore I repeat that a phonetician, when he emerges as a practical reformer and a hater of shams, may be dangerous in proportion to his ability and zeal.

A much bigger question—perhaps the biggest at issue—concerns vowel-degradation. I suppose we are all conservatives on this point, and should wish our vowel system to be kept as immune from change as may be. Every one who has noticed the

growing tendency of English to slur unaccented vowels to a uniform 'er' deplores the tendency and would wish to see it arrested. The Poet Laureate advocates an ideal or purist 'phonetic' spelling, which would make it possible to check decay by inculcating the maxim 'Speak as you spell'. Such a crusade would be less hopeless than it appears, if once the more glaring anomalies of our spelling were removed. It would have the schoolmasters behind it, whose influence is already apparent in such 'vulgarisms' as *opposite* (rhyming with *fight*), *extray-ordinary*, and *circumstánces* (rhyming with *dances* ; we say *sérkəmstənsiz*).[1]

No spelling could seriously pretend to be phonetic that did not produce this all-pervasive 'er'. Yet it seems doubtful if it would be quite accurate to register as final the debasement of so many vowels. My own impression is that the *a*s and *o*s, reduced in rapid speech to something very like the universal slur, yet retain a fugitive semblance of their proper value ; or at least that the speaker has a latent consciousness of the full sound, which emphasis or the need for distinctness may at any moment restore. If you say this is not phonetic truth, but the spurious influence of a traditional spelling, I shall not complain ; I am content to take

[1] I use inverted *e* to represent the slurs, as being less likely to mislead than Dr. Bridges' famous *er*.

my vowels where I can find them. It is certain that we have a sense of conventional values which is easily stimulated. Though we all say *sékənd* (or is it *seknd* ?), and should smile at *sékond* as an eccentricity ('curate's English'), yet as soon as the accent shifts we say *sekóndid* quite naturally and without any sense of a departure. When the old-fashioned pronouncing dictionaries tell us to pronounce *melancholy* as four syllables of equal dignity, most people are ready to believe they do so. In fact we all say *mélənkəli* ; but we have no sense of incongruity in making the adjective *melənkólik*. The true vowel disappears and reappears like the moon behind clouds. This may be bad phonetics, but I think it is good psychology, and a strong argument for the retention of the traditional and etymological vowel in words in which it has in practice deteriorated. Practical convenience seems to point in the same direction. For if *nation* and *national*, *ratio*, *rations* and *ratiocination*, *cəntént* and *cóntent* were spelled phonetically, the connexion between them would be to that extent obscured, and they would not even be found in juxtaposition in the new alphabetical dictionary. This is going to be serious when it is a question of learning a foreign language. The value of phonetics, as an aid to the acquisition of languages, is doubtless inestimable ; but is etymology much less important ?

Dr. Bradley has called attention to an alarming consequence of any radical reform of spelling on phonetic principles. English is already in possession of an enormous number of undisputed homophones; and the practical convenience of differentiation (as *pear*, *pair*, *pare*) is an asset of the existing spelling. But if *paw*, *poor*, and *pore* are to be proclaimed equal before the law—and it wants very little encouragement to make them so, in the vulgar dialect of the golf club—the number of our homophonous homographs will be legion, and the industrious foreigner may yet sigh for the old chaos.

It is an interesting speculation whether the study of phonetics on the one hand, and the adoption of a phonetic spelling on the other, are calculated to promote or to check phonetic change. The spread of phonetic knowledge ought, I think, to be conservative in its operation; but if zealous practitioners, impatient of the absurdities of the pronouncing dictionary, and not unwilling to make our flesh creep, seize upon each fresh corruption as it gains currency and publish it as a newly authenticated species, there is a danger that we may acquire the courage of our slovenliness.

The proposal to standardize 'educated South English' is particularly perilous. Educated South English is in practice not far removed from

Mr. Shaw's vulgar dialect of the golf club, or that speech of Duchesses which Pygmalion Higgins professes to consider worse English than the language of shop-assistants. To my own ear the speech of 'Eton and Christ Church', in spite of the insidious decay of its vowels, is still the most beautiful of earthly sounds. It is exquisitely modulated; its consonants have an unrivalled clarity; its cadences are instinct with breeding. But it has dangerous affinities; and a touch of burlesque is sufficient to approximate it to the English of Eliza Doolittle.

Standard English, however, is every day becoming the dialect of a class rather than of a province; and it may perhaps be hoped that the infusion of elements from the North and West and from overseas will, with help from phonetic enlightenment, give us a more nervous and accurate vowel system. But if phonetic spelling takes the bit in its teeth, it may hurry us to I know not what catastrophe.

The arguments in favour of phonetic spelling are too well known and too generally admitted to need much discussion. I was once inclined to think that if a boy were ever going to learn anything, he would learn to spell on the way. If so, we had only the foreigner to consider: and why should we consider the foreigner? What had the foreigner done

for us ? But it seems to be established—and this has been impressed on me by much reading of soldiers' letters—that the complexities of spelling are a real obstacle to even intelligent children ; and they are certainly a hindrance to the international pretensions of our language. Greek suffers from the same disabilities in the Near East. It is of course quite wrong to suppose that you can make English easy by spelling. However you spell it, it will retain its subtle, complex, and beautiful phonetics. (Greek has five vowels, and you can learn to pronounce it in half an hour.) Undoubtedly, however, a great deal could be done.

What has actually been done hitherto is negligible. The Americans have standardized a handful of spellings, which have been received 'on this side' with ignorant abuse. *Labor* is as good as *author* (*authour* became obsolete more than a hundred years ago) ; *labor* and *labour* were equally familiar to Milton. I do not see that *catalog* is any 'uglier' than *catalogue* or than *log*. I have forgotten the planks in Colonel Roosevelt's platform ; it cut very little ice. I regret that I am not acquainted with the proposals of the Society for the Promotion of Simplifid Speling ; I believe they are moderate.

It is clear to me that the Reformed Spelling, while it should, in the interest of our children, of foreigners and ourselves, be as phonetic as superior

considerations permit, is confined, in this direction, to generalization and rough approximation.

To determine the limits of possible simplification might be the business of a committee or academy, on which I suggest that phonetics should not be over-represented, and classical philology not excluded. In practical suggestions I fear I am not fertile ; being (as is perhaps apparent) a reformer in despite of my prejudices. Certain minor reforms are dear to my heart ; but I find they commend themselves for reasons foreign to phonetics. I should like to put in a plea—but that Dr. Bridges has done it better than I can hope to do—for a certain latitude in the new spelling, and for the retention of some ' useless ' letters. *ph* is unambiguous, and has an obvious history. *qu* is equally unambiguous ; and it seems a pity (especially if we are legislating for our own language only) to change the *quali-* and *quanti-* words to *kwoli-* and *kwonti-*. I should preserve common and simple combinations like *-ous*, *-or*, *ex-*, *-ed*, *-age* ; all of which have an obvious ' semantic ' value apart from their phonetic value. But I should give up, or make optional, the distinction between *-ant* and *-ent*, which is not very important and is a notorious stumbling-block. (But keep *pedant*, because of *pedantic*.)

The question of an accent to indicate stress in words of more than one syllable will have to be

considered. It would be very useful ; and it can be done without the complications in printing and typewriting which the existing systems of interlinear accents involve. All that is necessary is a separate symbol indicating stress ; thus *pro:fer* for *proffer*, *prefer*: for *prefer*, or the like. A symbol could no doubt be devised which would lend itself to ligature ; otherwise it would be awkward for manuscript. But in any case the stress-symbol might very well be optional. It might be a convention, in 'stressed' print, that disyllables should be trochees, and polysyllables dactyls, unless otherwise indicated. Then *rumble* and *multitude* and *multitudinous* would need no stress-sign ; *relapse* and *vagary* and *detonated* would. If stress were indicated we could get rid of some double consonants which at present are not phonetically useless. I am prepared to sacrifice etymology and accept *acomodation*, *comend* ; I am reluctant to give up the second *d* in *addition*, but perhaps it might be spared.

It is I think reasonable to accept radical changes in common little words, while arguing for the traditional spelling of longer and more learned words. In the first place, *abscess* and *accommodation* and *hyacinth* are obstacles which very little learning is required to surmount ; the real trouble, to both children and foreigners, is *thought* and *cough* and *seize* and *sieve*. And in the second place, whereas

words of the former class have never seriously varied from Cicero's time to our own, words of the latter class were, until 1650, or later, very variously spelled. *Cease* was as good as *seize* in Shakespeare's time, *deceave* as common as *deceive*. I have a book before me, printed in 1636, in which I find *sodaine*, *yeere*, *wil*, *sence*, *proove*, *gemme*, *fowle*, *garded*, *cattell*.

C is a debatable letter. There is perhaps no very grave reason against the substitution of *k* for hard *c*; but it would be a pity to use *s* for soft *c* and confuse the origin of *subside* and *suicide*. On the whole I am in favour of keeping *c* for both sounds; the rule governing the pronunciation is easy, and common to French and Italian. In that case *k* is not much wanted, except for *keep* and *kitten*; but I should write *katalog* and *kataklysm*. Why should we let the poverty of the Roman alphabet cheat us of our kappa? *ck* seems unnecessary (though Johnson deplored its disuse in *critick*); *crack* might be *crac* or *crak*. *Ch* is really troublesome. It should probably be restricted to the sound it has in *church*; *k* could be used for Greek *chi* words (when hard) as well as for *kappa* words—this would distinguish *kimera* (*chimera*) from *child* and *charity*; *chemise* and *charlatan* are a nuisance, and had better be spelled *sh*. *Knee* and *knave* are not worth keeping.

The *r* which has disappeared from South English is still sounded in practically every other dialect. *Pert* and *port* must remain, therefore. Silent *h* might be dropped (*onor*, *onest*). *j* is so infrequent in Latin words that I see no great difficulty in using it to replace soft *g*; I suggest *giv* (*give*), *jib* (*jib*), *jibe* (*gibe*). The convention of *gu* for hard *g* is clumsy even in French, and in English it is not universally applicable. *dh* and *z* might replace *th* and *s* in all words having the sound of *that* or *please*.

The real trouble, of course, is with the vowels. The ideal is to simplify as far as simplification may be possible and desirable, due regard being paid to (1) identity of related words, (2) identity of words, prefixes, suffixes, &c., common to European languages, (3) differentiation of homophones, (4) avoidance of scandal to Scotsmen, Americans and purists generally. I am clear that these considerations exclude the slurs, long and short (long in *curtail*, *modern*—which should not rhyme with *trodden*; short in *commit*, *abhor*). I am doubtful if they should not exclude the assimilation of *mane* to *main*, *bier* to *beer*. But they leave us free to advocate a very great number of changes which are desirable for the sake of simplicity, and which, by bringing the written language closer to the spoken language, would conduce to greater purity and uniformity of speech.

If a purely phonetic spelling is neither practicable nor politic, that is not to say that phonetic science is not of the greatest practical importance. Its value as a means of education is now well known. It is very desirable that a simple phonetic notation should be generally taught ; that of the International Phonetic Association (now in general use, though Sweet thought it not well suited to English) is I think quite simple enough to be generally intelligible. Every serious dictionary should indicate pronunciation by this means ; and if phonetics can be used in schools to make our pronunciation at once more accurate and more uniform, the gain would be immense. I have tried to show that phonetic spelling would achieve neither of these ends, and that it would involve us in dangers and inconveniences of unsuspected magnitude.

KALINOVA. *October* 1917.



The DECAY of SYNTAX[1]

THE morbid state of modern English prose is generally recognized by competent judges. 'Mr. Bevan was right', says Professor Phillimore in the preface to his translation of Propertius, 'when he argued that the present state of the language is peculiarly favourable to translators. The incipient senile ataxy of English restores us something of the receptiveness which in the Elizabethans was an effect of juvenal elasticity.' If this judgement is true, it is apparent that any beauty in modern English prose can be only the beauty of decay; and the supposed imbecility of modern English can be only one symptom of a deep-seated national corruption. More sanguine censors of modern tendencies may hope that the maladies under which most modern writing labours are due to temporary causes, to preoccupation and negligence which may in time be cured.

An examination of everyday speech will perhaps suggest that it is our written rather than our

[1] This essay is in part a rehandling of a theme first developed in a series of articles published in the Oxford University Magazine under the title of *Jargon*, and written in collaboration with Mr. G. S. Gordon, then of Magdalen College, subsequently Professor and Captain Gordon. I owe to my friend some of the choicest flowers in the garland.

colloquial English that betrays the languor of senility. The spoken English of all classes is now commonly most invertebrate and flaccid when it relies upon a literary tradition to which it owes no more than a formal allegiance; and most virile when it trusts its native wit and coins phrases from the accidents of daily life or borrows them from foreign experience. The modern Englishman in his talk pays little regard to propriety of diction; he is ignorant of etymology and careless of euphony; but he has a keen sense of the picturesque, and a significant interest in phonetics. The inherited modes of expression have ceased to interest him; and accordingly the ordinary journalistic English, which is almost purely traditional, is not merely decadent; it is formless, incurious and lifeless. Soldiers' letters, which are a kind of journalism, are one-half formulary. 'I take great pleasure in writing these few lines in answer to your welcome letter.' The remainder is mainly an echo of the popular newspapers; only an insignificant fraction reflects the writer's natural and nervous speech.

The decline of literary English is not recent; it has been going on for more than a century. Written English reached its highest general level in the latter part of the eighteenth century. That age, like the Augustan age of Rome, which also reached a high level of literary form, was an age in

which it seemed to the orthodox majority that human discovery and development had gone nearly as far as they were likely to go ; that the great discoveries had been made, and the fundamental doctrines of science and religion established. It remained only to elaborate details, to put the coping-stone on the wall of knowledge. Men were thus at liberty to study the vehicle of accepted truth, and to add elegance to knowledge which no longer needed support. Johnson once believed it possible, by judicious selection from the works of approved writers, to standardize an English vocabulary which would need no innovation, and would allow expression to any ideas that might require it.

What is called the Romantic Revival was, as it affected English prose style, not a revival but a revolt. The poets, indeed, by drawing on the past and the present, were able to enrich the poetic vocabulary and to burst the narrow metrical banks in which poetry had been condemned to flow. But the prose revolutionists of the early nineteenth century were rather iconoclasts than builders. The revolt was a real revolt. In the half-century which followed the death of Johnson old idols had been shattered, and men's minds were seething with new ideas. But the instrument of language is a thing in its nature traditional. It is easily

damaged, and painfully mended. Lamb and his contemporaries did much to impair its structure, and what they destroyed they did not rebuild. Their writing, great and vital as it is, was therefore in its formal aspect rather decadent than renascent. The most popular qualities of their style, its delicate allusiveness and wealth of reminiscence, are characteristic of a silver age.

The formlessness which is incipient in the essayists of the early nineteenth century was rapidly aggravated. The results may be studied in the writings of some of the most popular of the Victorian novelists. What has been admired or derided as the style of Charles Dickens does not deserve to be called a style. It is a mere collection of indifferent tricks. Anthony Trollope, who is free from mannerism, is entirely without style. His writing is not offensive, and at its best it has an attractive simplicity ; but at its worst it might almost be called illiterate. It is perhaps significant that these two writers are supreme masters of dialogue. Trollope's own writing is nothing ; when he makes his people talk he is inspired.

Poetry is a form highly artificial and conventional : colloquial speech is the child of circumstances constantly in flux. Both, therefore, vary widely from age to age, alike in vocabulary and in arrangement. But most descriptive and delibera-

tive prose deals far more with the permanent than with the shifting elements of life and language; and as it is not necessary, neither is it desirable that it should suffer rapid changes. The vocabulary and structure of English prose as they were used by Swift, Addison, Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, and as they were in the main preserved by many of the best writers among the historians and essayists of the nineteenth century, are sufficiently rich and elastic to afford ample room for that expression of individual genius which is style. There is no question of seeking to perpetuate an outworn fashion, but of eradicating certain innovations which can be shown to be definitely vicious. The most serious and orderly prose, the prose of narration, criticism and argument, of historians, statesmen, and lawyers, is naturally and rightly conservative. It would be easy to show that modern prose of this kind is, in fact, composed of the same materials as the prose of Dryden. Very little has been added to the vocabulary of deliberation and reflection, because there was little to add. The words are the same; but they are used with less accuracy and arranged with less care.

Misapprehension may, perhaps, be most conveniently avoided by naming some of the best living writers of English prose, having regard to their manner only. Such an illustrative list—for

it need be nothing more—might include Mr. Robert Bridges, Sir Walter Raleigh, Mr. Hilaire Belloc (when he chooses), Mr. E. V. Lucas, and Mr. John Masefield. All these writers have clearly formed their style by the study of seventeenth and eighteenth-century models: and as prose style must be formed upon models, their prose is good because their models are good. But they are in no way archaistic; they abstain from no modernism that really aids their expression. They are not travelling by post-chaise because they think railways vulgar. They have merely adopted the structure of the best English prose, and have found it adequate to the most exacting demands of their twentieth-century fancy and invention.

It will be said of the examples quoted below that it is improper to compare the great artists of the past with the journeymen of the present, or to expect the hasty writer of a paragraph to write like Burke. The answer is that the prose of Burke's humbler contemporaries is in its simple elements not very different from his, and that the prose of the modern journalist only exaggerates faults which are to be found in the writing of most modern historians and men of letters. The journeyman of 1780 studied good models, and wrote with some care. To-day even the High Priests are not always orthodox; and professors whose business

is literary criticism permit themselves to write in a manner which nullifies their authority. This is a painful subject, and quotation would be invidious ; but it would be easy to cite from the writings of eminent critics paragraphs written with a contempt of linguistic decency which it should be their business to castigate in the essays of their pupils.

The most serious vices of modern prose are indifference to the etymology and proper meaning of words ; neglect of order and rhythm ; impatience of anything that can be called inversion ; love of periphrastic prepositions ; a tendency to prefer the abstract to the concrete and to use nouns instead of verbs ; and an indolent acquiescence in worn-out phrases. The first fault, which is obviously connected with the decline of classical knowledge, is seen in *transpire* meaning *happen* ; in *constitutes a leading feature* ; in *somewhat unique* ; in the slang use of *incidentally*; in *the individual in question*, meaning *this person* ; and in a hundred laxities in the application and combination of words, less flagrant than these notorious solecisms, and therefore more insidious ; as *ascertain* for *find out*, *anticipate* for *expect* or *foresee*. An example of this kind of deterioration is supplied by a curious use of the word *emphatically* to mean something like *undoubtedly* or *unmistakably*. 'The stories', says one journalist, 'are emphatically of the ghostly

order.' 'The situation', says another, 'is emphatically central.' This is of course impossible; emphasis may be predicated of an assertion, not of the fact asserted.

Many such abuses of language have been recently the subject of lively discussion in *The Times Literary Supplement*. But these, since they are at once more generally recognized and more easily rectified, are less dangerous than the general paralysis of structure which deforms almost all modern writing, and to which even critical ears have grown indifferent. The order of the eighteenth-century sentence was no doubt too formal and its rhythm too regular. Thus it was held inadmissible to close a sentence on an insignificant word. One of the few rules of composition that still command assent forbids a sentence to end with a preposition. But in general the modern sentence has neither rhythm nor structure; it goes on till it drops. The practice of dictation to a stenographer may have something to do with this. Dictation abhors second thoughts and erasures, and a first draft looks more plausible when neatly typewritten than it does in manuscript.

The sequence of words has become fixed, and any variation is now resented. This is perhaps partly due to the vicious habit of reading by the eye. The result is often to increase the number

of words necessary to lucidity, and, in particular, periphrastic formulas are employed which have no relation to the architecture of the sentence. Johnson could write 'But of the works of *Shakespeare* the condition has been far different'; and 'the explanations transcribed from others, if I do not subjoin any other interpretation, I suppose commonly to be right'. In modern writing these sentences would almost certainly begin 'But in the case of Shakespeare' and 'With regard to the explanations'. This is pardonable in extemporary speech; a man says 'With regard to Shakespeare' when he knows he has something to say about Shakespeare but has not quite made up his mind what it is to be; but it cannot be called composition. The fact is that *in the case of* and *with regard to* have no definite meaning at all; they are mere labels, like the 'Reference so-and-so' of commercial or military correspondence. These phrases are defended as being necessary, or as being convenient, or as avoiding obscurity. Necessary they are not; for English prose did without them for centuries. Convenient they doubtless are; for it is always easier to say in twenty words what should be said in ten. Lucidity may sometimes be gained: 'Jones's nose was red' may be less clear than 'In the case of Jones (as distinguished from Smith's) his nose was red' or 'Jones was red as to his nose';

but at what a cost ! Far more often these formulas conceal ambiguity or looseness of thinking. 'Shirt-sleeves will be worn in all cases' was the order of an angry Staff officer who had met a man wearing a coat contrary to regulations and was determined that the practice should cease. But neither he nor any one else knew what was meant.

Once phrases such as these are by any pretext introduced, they are welcomed by that pleonasm which is the original sin of language, and used for their own sweet sakes. 'In numerous instances', writes Cobbett, 'the farmers have ceased to farm for themselves.' It is not clear even from the context whether Cobbett meant 'in many districts' or simply 'many farmers'; he must have meant one or the other. The proper word for a passage in a book is *place*; critics speak of 'a place in Aristotle's Poetics'. But this use is obsolescent even in the language of criticism. I have examined a valuable recent work on a great poet, and have failed to find it. Numberless places in the poet's works are quoted or referred to, but they are all *cases* or *instances*. The proper use of the word *case* is seen in 'a case of conscience' or *The Case is Alter'd*; lines of poetry are not cases. The inroads of this disease are remarkable; *case* is employed not only to avoid some trifling difficulty of construction, but where there is no apparent motive.

It is possible to find newspaper paragraphs in which every other sentence furnishes a *case* or an *instance*. 'Fifteen men were wounded, but none died', becomes 'but in no case were the injuries mortal'. 'Most of the wounds were caused by machine-gun bullets, very few by shell-fire', becomes 'The wounds were in most cases caused, &c.; in very few instances were they due, &c.' The proper use of 'that is not the case' may be seen from a use which is now growing obsolete, 'that is not my case'. (We now say, 'With me the case is different'.) 'That is not the case' should not mean merely 'that is not so'; and 'It is not the case that Napoleon died of a broken heart' is inaccurate: no case has been stated.

It should not be supposed that too great stress is laid on these words. *Case* and *instance* are the commonest and the most dangerous of a number of parasitic growths which are the dry rot of syntax. It seems worth while to examine the use of these particles in some detail, even at the risk of a tedious multiplication of examples. Accumulation of evidence imposes conviction; and the following quotations, most of which are drawn from respectable sources, should dissipate any notion that the fictitious specimens given above are exaggerated.

The least unnatural use of *case* is to indicate

emphasis or to escape a difficulty of arrangement. 'In the case of cigars sold singly they were made smaller.' 'In the case of my old school-fellows a smaller proportion would seem to have become famous than in the case of my contemporaries at Oxford.' Here *in the case of* marks an antithesis which the eighteenth century would have conveyed by inversion: 'of my old school-fellows fewer have become famous than of my contemporaries at Oxford': but *than of* has, it seems, become obscure, and it is hardly found in modern English, which substitutes *than in the case of* or *than is the case with*. Even 'where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise' has been thought to require elucidation: an eminent grammarian explains that '*where* = *in cases where*'. Even commoner than this, and less explicable, is the substitution of, *e.g.*, *books in many cases* for *many books*. 'Individual landowners, who in many cases will have to pay' (that is *many of whom*) is one of five exactly similar phrases in a single article by Mr. Harold Cox. A shipwreck produced these narratives: 'The occupants of the frail crafts were in the majority of cases only partially clad'. 'Women were in many instances the only occupants of the boats.' 'The survivors were in many cases so exhausted.' In the description of a thunderstorm it was stated that 'in two instances buildings were struck'.

Case and *instance* are often used as dummies instead of other nouns. A learned journal, reviewing a book on screens, complained that 'there are four cases in which good old screenwork is still to be found in Middlesex churches, and not one of these instances is so much as named' by the authors. Thus *case* means *church*: but it means also a parliamentary division: for we find that 'a survey of their holdings in the expiring Parliament shows their tenure to be precarious in more than a score of instances, extending from Scotland to Devonshire'. It is so easy to translate these sentences into English that it is difficult to understand why the average writer finds it more natural, as he plainly does, to deal in counters than in coin. It is easier to see why counters are used when their presence betrays that the writer has not taken pains to express his meaning, or has, perhaps, no meaning to express. 'As regards enemy aliens, in no instance was a case of danger suggested by any witness' (Mr. Justice —— quoted by the *Star*). 'In some instances names of the localities mentioned in the text are not given in the maps.' This probably means 'some place-names': but it might mean that some (not all) of the maps were defective. Finally, apologists for modern syntax are invited to consider how much meaning they could extract from the following sentence, if it

were in a language not their own. The writer wishes to convey that when Sainte-Beuve in his *Causeries* wrote two essays on the same topic, the second is not a mere rehash of the first. He expresses his meaning thus: 'In the cases above noted, when two or more handlings of the same subject by the author exist, the comparison of the two usually suffices to show how little vamping there is in the case of the latter'.

A recognized symptom of the decay of a language is the confusion of prepositions. This has long been apparent in English: yet though people vex themselves over such an isolated anomaly as *different to*, the indiscriminate use of the composite prepositions *as to* and *in the case of* is hardly noticed. The examples quoted are from the novels of Trollope, who makes *as to* do duty for *of*, *about*, *on*, *for*, and *to*; 'proper notions as to (*of*) a woman's duty': 'sarcastic as to (*about*) his hunting': 'said a good word as to (*for*) Dingles, and bantered himself as to (*on*) his own want of skill': 'a great impropriety, as to (*to*) which neither could be got to assent'. When this is done by a famous writer, we cannot be surprised if military authority ordains that 'strict attention will be paid as to saluting', and a Government official calls for 'a full explanation of the circumstances as to why'.

Most redundant expressions have their origin

in some attempt to cope with a real difficulty of construction. Many adjectives and adjectival expressions have in English no corresponding abstract noun. A writer describing a motoring accident wishes to convey that a by-road was hidden and to attribute the collision to that circumstance; and, having committed himself to a certain form by writing 'There can be no doubt that the accident was caused', cannot proceed 'by the hiddenness of the by-road', and is driven to periphrasis. He may write 'by the by-road's being hidden'; but the gerund is an awkward tool, and in many contexts is impossible. Otherwise he has his choice of 'the fact that' and 'the hidden character'. There are, of course, better ways out; but the difficulty is real, and the journalist must get out quickly. Having found the subterfuge useful, he uses it again when he has no need of it; and so we find a whisky commended 'on account of its light character, purity and age'. Still commoner is the purely otiose use of *nature*, *character*, &c., in such phrases as 'foundations of a circular character'. The motive is, perhaps, an indistinct aspiration after emphasis or balance; but again the periphrasis is so attractive that it is used when no motive can be assigned. 'The book is of a most interesting nature'; 'the weather is expected to be of a less windy character'; 'unemployment of a chronic

character' ; 'a *mésalliance* of a pronounced order' ; 'hats of the cartwheel persuasion'. Verbiage of this kind is not only bad in itself ; its effect is to empty words of their proper meaning. A word which means everything means nothing ; and as *character* is degenerating into a suffix 'He is a man of bad character' begins to sound archaic.

The vices here illustrated are typical of many more, and most of them are comprehended when it is said that modern writing is abstract when it should be concrete. The simplest statements are involved in a cloud of abstraction ; not because journalists are philosophers, but because the abuse of abstract terms has become an almost universal habit. The origin of the evil is obscure, but it may be suspected that a principal cause is cowardice. A man who is uncertain of his facts will write without a twinge of conscience such a sentence as this : 'The percentage of mortality due to measles is often exaggerated'. If he had said that *fewer people die of measles than is supposed*, he might have asked himself if he were sure it was true. It is certain that abstract writing is the convenient and natural refuge of confused thinking. Every man who understands the art of writing, and has tried to write well, is aware that the process of composition is commonly not the simple transference of thought into language, but the laborious attempt to work

into a coherent shape ideas which have been in his mind but which have still to be clarified and arranged; and the temptation to gloss over weak places by deliberate ambiguity is often unmistakable. A writer with an inaccurate mind is doubtless unconscious of this, and is the more likely to fall into the trap.

The habit of verbosity reacts strongly upon the intelligence. The modern reader, whose eye is accustomed to gallop over columns of flaccid print, reads Bacon's Essays at the same pace and with the same attention, and is surprised to find them obscure. A man of intelligence, not addicted to literature, picked up a volume of Johnson's *Rambler*, and after a few minutes was heard to exclaim, 'This is very odd stuff: I have to read it three times before I can understand it'. Yet has the *Rambler* been called platitudinous! The ear, and even the mind, are now so corrupted that abstract jargon is not only more palatable, but even more easily digested, than clean and terse English. A specimen of local history, intended for children and prepared by a master of simple concrete prose, was unanimously rejected by a committee of elementary schoolmasters as being 'more suitable for secondary schools'.

It is needless to multiply illustrations, however entertaining, of a jargon which infects every

newspaper paragraph. But it does not seem to be generally grasped that this habit of abstract expression is the gravest of all diseases of language. Most essays in admonition are directed against the corruption of single words or against such venial inelegancies as the split infinitive. When a wider generalization is advanced, it usually dissuades us from indulgence in Latinisms and polysyllables. It is true that big words should be avoided where little words will serve, and that words of Latin origin are often to be avoided as cumbrous or as unfamiliar. But it is incomparably more important to resist the invasion of parasitic circumlocutions and abstractions, which are far worse than inelegant. The man who writes 'instances of premature mortality are more frequent in the case of men than in the case of women', when he means that *more men die young than women*, sins against the light. Such writing is vicious not because it is pompous but because it is dishonest. It uses unnecessary and obscure abstractions to misstate the fact, and is a cause, as well as an effect, of inaccurate and insincere thinking. Yet we find a critic complaining that 'the effort of some writers to attract their readers by writing as they talk furthers the degeneracy of the written language'. *O si sic omnes!* The English we speak is often inaccurate and ungrammatical, and disfigured by

the unintelligent use of slang; but it is at least straightforward, and gets to its meaning by the shortest road.

ITEA.

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JOHNSON in SCOTLAND

JOHNSON'S *Journey to the Western Islands* is, says Boswell, 'a most valuable performance. It abounds in extensive philosophical views of society, and in ingenious sentiment and lively description.' The public has at no time shown a very lively interest in extensive views of society. Though the *Journey* was much talked of in London and much abused in Edinburgh, the 4,000 copies which Strahan printed were perhaps not exhausted in ten years;[1] at least, no second edition was called for until the publication of Boswell's *Tour* reminded the world of its more dignified precursor. It has since reposed in the voluminous collection of Johnson's Works; and Boswell's garrulous diary has perhaps found a hundred readers where the

[1] This I find is not accurate; at least three impressions were printed in London in 1775, and two in Dublin.

Journey has found one. Every one knows the passage about Iona, because it is quoted by Boswell; and every one remembers the picture of 'a man black as a Cyclops from the forge', because it is ridiculed by Macaulay. There, for the most part, curiosity has stopped.

Yet the *Journey* is a book such as has been written only once, and such as only one man could have written. We may say of it what Hamilton said of its author, 'No man can be said to put you in mind of Johnson'. Johnson's book of travel is utterly unlike all other books of travel. It is, however, a genuine book of travel, and not a series of disquisitions masquerading as a journal. Orme, the historian of the East, said that the book contained 'thoughts which, by long revolution in the great mind of Johnson, have been formed and polished like pebbles rolled in the ocean'; and Johnson himself said that 'in travelling, a man must carry knowledge with him, if he would bring home knowledge'. But the knowledge was poured forth, and the thoughts were polished, because Johnson's curiosity had been excited and his imagination stirred by strange scenes and unfamiliar modes of life. The book came straight out of his mind, in a torrent of eloquence. Sir Walter Raleigh says that 'when Johnson is verbose and languid, it is often because his subject is slight and does not

yield him matter enough to fill his capacious style'. There is in the *Journey* very little of such verbosity or languor. In the Hebrides Johnson's mind was occupied with 'the face of nature' and with the daily life of a struggling and discontented peasantry, and suffered from no poverty of material. Even when he writes about trifles, Johnson has often more to say than other men. When the author of an *Introduction to the Game of Draughts* wished to dedicate his book to a nobleman, Johnson supplied the dedication, from which Boswell quotes this sentence :

> Triflers may find or make anything a trifle ; but since it is the great characteristick of a wise man to see events in their courses, to obviate consequences, and ascertain contingencies, your Lordship will think nothing a trifle by which the mind is inured to caution, foresight, and circumspection.

It is impossible not to smile ; and the reader of the *Journey* will smile very often. But if he understands Johnson his smile will be a smile not of derision, but of affectionate amusement. The value of draughts as mental training might have been set forth in simpler and less Latinized phrases ; but every word in the sentence is strictly true, and not one is superfluous. Johnson knew the faults of his style as well as any man, and has described them better than his critics. In the *Journey* he calls himself a pedant. He could not alter his style any

more than he could acquire the virtues of tidiness and punctuality. He wrote as it was natural to him to write ; and phrases which in other men's writing would argue self-conceit are in Johnson's only one more proof of his sincerity.

In narration he can be perfectly simple.

> On our return we found a little boy upon the point of the rock, catching with his angle a supper for the family. We rowed up to him, and borrowed his rod, with which Mr. Boswell caught a cuddy.

This incident suggested no reflection, and may have been copied straight out of his note-book. But as soon as his attention is closely engaged we hear the familiar strokes of the hammer on the anvil :

> Our guides told us that the horses could not travel all day without rest or meat, and intreated us to stop here, because no grass would be found in any other place. The request was reasonable and the argument cogent.

Johnson loved animals, and he may have reproached himself with want of consideration.

On one point Johnson is in agreement with Martin, Pennant, and the rest, in whose eyes heather is merely brown, and precipices either terrifying or disgusting. The beauty of an island on a lake has been a commonplace since Scott made Loch Katrine famous ; Johnson writes of Loch Lomond,

> The islets, which court the gazer at a distance, disgust him at his approach when he finds, instead of soft lawns and shady thickets, nothing more than uncultivated ruggedness.

That he should see beauties in nature when other travellers saw only hideous desolation is perhaps not to be expected. Yet a lover of Johnson and of the Hebrides may be tempted to think that he would have seen more beauty if he had seen more sunlight. The summer of 1773 was, it is evident, unusually dry in the Highlands; but the weather broke on the day the travellers left the mainland, and from that point both journals are full of complaints of rain and wind. Johnson always denied that the weather had any influence on his spirits. This may have been true in Fleet-street; but in the islands it is apparent that the gloomy thoughts excited by poverty and depopulation, illiteracy and exaction, were aggravated by weather which was 'almost one continued storm'. 'Their winter overtakes their summer, and the harvest lies upon the ground drenched with rain.'

He came nearest to the modern opinion of Highland scenery in the passage from Fort Augustus to Glenelg, when, recognizing (as we have seen) the cogency of the argument about the horses, he rested in Glen Sheal:

> I sat down on a bank, such as a writer of Romance might have delighted to feign. I had indeed no trees to whisper over my head, but a clear rivulet streamed at my feet. The day was calm, the air soft, and all was rudeness, silence, and solitude. . . . Whether I spent the hour well I know not; for here I first conceived the thought of this narration.

Another placid interval occurred at Inch Kenneth, when they sailed among the islands at night :

> The day soon failed us, and the moon presented a very solemn and pleasing scene. The sky was clear, so that the eye commanded a wide circle ; the sea was neither still nor turbulent ; the wind neither silent nor loud. We were never far from one coast or another, on which, if the weather had become violent, we could have found shelter, and therefore contemplated at ease the region through which we glided in the tranquillity of the night, and saw now a rock and now an island grow gradually conspicuous and gradually obscure.

On another occasion he enjoyed the clash of the elements :

> The wind was loud, the rain was heavy, and the whistling of the blast, the fall of the shower, the rush of the cataracts, and the roar of the torrent, made a nobler chorus of the rough musick of nature than it had ever been my chance to hear before.

A great part of the *Journey* is made up, as Boswell says, of general disquisitions. But of these none are irrelevant, and hardly any are digressions. Johnson's discussions of emigration, of the decay of the feudal spirit, of the poverty and inaccuracy of Highland tradition, of the Second Sight, of the dilapidation of the churches, are all prompted by the eager curiosity of his mind and his sympathy with all that affects human happiness. If his arguments are abstract and general, they are so because Johnson was a philosopher ; but when the language is most abstract, the thought and feeling

behind it are often then most concrete and vivid. This is a part of his discussion of the motives to emigration :

> Let it be inquired, whether the first intention of those who are fluttering on the wing, and collecting a flock that they may take their flight, be to attain good, or to avoid evil. If they are dissatisfied with that part of the globe, which their birth has allotted them, and resolve not to live without the pleasures of happier climates; if they long for bright suns, and calm skies, and flowery fields, and fragrant gardens, I know not by what eloquence they can be persuaded, or by what offers they can be hired to stay.

He had seen rotting harvests and noted the scanty yield of primitive agriculture in a barren soil ; he had heard of hard landlords and rapacious middlemen ; he had seen an emigrant ship and heard the lamentations of exiles ; the sorrow and resentment which these things excited issue in this verdict :

> To soften the obdurate, to convince the mistaken, to mollify the resentful, are worthy of a statesman ; but it affords a legislator little self-applause to consider, that where there was formerly an insurrection, there is now a wilderness.

The rhetorical smoothness of the words cannot hide the passionate sincerity of the thought.

Most people when they first read the *Journey* will, perhaps, be chiefly amused by the picture it presents of the lettered sage interrogating Highland lairds, riding on shelties, and sleeping in a barn,

and by the sonorous diction in which these adventures are described. If they take up the book again, they will be more at leisure to remark the power with which his thought grapples to a subject and the real compactness and density of his periods. For the *Journey*, like all the best of Johnson's writing, deserves and repays study. Sir Walter Raleigh remarks that when he seems to write commonplace, 'it will be found on examination to be something far different'. His thoughts are always his own thoughts, and when he utters an old truth we know that it has been grasped by a mind which knew more and felt more than common men's. We all know that life is short; few minds are capable of the tragic intensity with which Johnson's entertained the conviction of mortality. The marvellous precision of his language arises not from the nicety of a lexicographer, but from a rare power of intellectual discrimination. He often uses words unnecessarily odd, or unnecessarily ponderous—as succedaneous, conglobate—but he is incapable of using words with a loose application. Of wealth and power he writes: 'Power pleases the violent and proud; wealth delights the placid and the timorous. Youth, therefore, flies at power, and age grovels after riches.' Here every word is just; the only departure from symmetry, the repetition of *the* in the second clause, is explained when we

remember that the proud are commonly violent but the placid are not always timorous.

It is remarkable that a man who all his life was accused of an ignorant and malignant prejudice against Scotland should have written a book entirely about Scotsmen, which, in spite of some asperities, is yet full of sympathy and lovingkindness. The Highland gentlemen were quick to acknowledge the tribute ; the Lowlanders, perhaps for that reason, remained suspicious, and looked for insults when none were intended. National vanity seized upon Johnson's remarks on the nakedness of the road between Berwick and St. Andrews, and abused him for saying what he had not said—that Scotland had no trees. To many Scots Johnson is to-day the ignorant and overbearing Londoner, who came uninvited to Scotland and could find no trees. Let us turn from an injurious tradition to the authentic document. In the Lowlands he deplores the lack, not indeed of trees, but of large trees and old trees. In England the Restoration was the age of planting ; in Scotland this came later ; 'it may be doubted whether before the Union any Lowlander between Edinburgh and England had ever set a tree. Of this improvidence no other account can be given than that it probably began in times of tumult, and continued because it had begun.' By Loch Ness he noted and admired the woods of birch, 'the

hardy native of the North'; but the islands he found almost denuded of timber, and was solicitous to seek a remedy :

It is natural, in traversing this gloom of desolation, to inquire whether something may not be done to give nature a more cheerful face, and whether those hills and moors that afford heath cannot with a little care and labour bear something better?

The philosophy of planting has never been better expounded than by Johnson. He shows that trees will grow, because stumps remain where they once grew ; and that to sow seeds and watch them sprout is neither costly nor laborious :

But there is a frightful interval between the seed and timber. He that calculates the growth of trees, has the unwelcome remembrance of the shortness of life driven hard upon him. He knows that he is doing what will never benefit himself; and when he rejoices to see the stem rise, is disposed to repine that another shall cut it down.

Plantation is naturally the employment of a mind unburdened with care, and vacant to futurity, saturated with present good, and at leisure to derive gratification from the prospect of posterity. He that pines with hunger is in little care how others shall be fed. The poor man is seldom studious to make his grandson rich.

It may be soon discovered why in a place which hardly supplies the cravings of necessity, there has been little attention to the delights of fancy, and why distant convenience is unregarded, when the thoughts are turned with incessant solicitude upon every possibility of immediate advantage.

The severest censure that arose out of Johnson's visit to Scotland was directed against his own city of Lichfield. It has been preserved by an accident.

The ruined churches of the Hebrides reminded him that many of the English cathedrals were then 'mouldering by unregarded dilapidation'. At Elgin he was shown an order directing the lead to be stripped from the roof. The same thing, it appears, had been contemplated at Lichfield. Johnson wrote what he thought; but afterwards, reflecting that the Dean was a very old man, and had once done him a kindness, he repented, and begged Strahan to cancel the passage and reprint a leaf (the sheet being already printed). The letter in which the request was made has been preserved; the cancelled passage was somewhere seen by Gough the antiquary, who wrote it in the margin of his copy, now in the Bodleian. The cancelled passage and the motives of its suppression do equal honour to Johnson's generous temper. 'The Dean did me a kindness about forty years ago. He is now very old, and I am not young. Reproach can do him no good, and in myself I know not whether it is zeal or wantonness.' Here is the suppressed passage—its sting is in its tail:

> There is now, as I have heard, a body of men not less decent or virtuous than the Scottish Council, longing to melt the lead of an English cathedral. What they shall melt, it were just that they should swallow.

Johnson's regard for Boswell is nowhere more pleasingly shown than in the *Journey*. 'I have

endeavoured to do you some justice in the first paragraph', he wrote in June 1774. Boswell was too proud of the encomium not to quote it. In the course of the narrative he is frequently mentioned, often with warm and judicious praise. 'Mr. Boswell's frankness and gaiety made everybody communicative.' Johnson almost always writes in the plural; though the opinions thus stated were certainly his own, and Boswell's share no more than honorary.

Nowhere can be found better examples of Johnson's political wisdom, or of his passion for accuracy, or of his characteristic gloom. He said once, 'Why, Sir, most political experiments are very laughable things'. In the *Journey* he is more guarded, but not much more hopeful. 'In political regulations, good cannot be complete, it can only be predominant.' 'No scheme of policy has, in any country, yet brought the rich and poor on equal terms into courts of judicature. Perhaps experience, improving on experience, may in time effect it.' When Johnson visited the Hebrides he found his conviction that innovation is dangerous, that it is easier to demolish than to build, powerfully reinforced. The people were poor and ill-contented. Many had emigrated, but those who remained were no more prosperous. They had lost their martial ardour with their arms, and had no other

motive to emulation. They were losing their devotion to their chiefs, and had no sentiment of loyalty to put in its place. The lairds had raised their rents, but they had learned to spend them abroad, and many were embarrassed. Schools had been established, but, as they taught only English, education could not thrive. And 'if the remembrance of papal superstition is obliterated, the monuments of papal piety are likewise effaced'.

The laxity of Highland narration he is not content to state and condemn.

> They have inquired and considered little, and do not always feel their own ignorance. They are not much accustomed to be interrogated by others; and seem never to have thought upon interrogating themselves; so that if they do not know what they tell to be true, they likewise do not distinctly perceive it to be false.

If he does not spare Highland inaccuracy, neither does he spare his own. 'I brought away rude measures of the buildings, such as I cannot much trust myself, inaccurately taken, and obscurely noted.' This, which in another writer might be an affectation of superiority to drudgery, is in Johnson contrition.

Johnson was not always melancholy. He was full of humour and affectionate playfulness, and no man had ever a keener zest in the exercise of his powers. But when he sits down to give judgement on human affairs, it is his considered verdict that

the balance is against us, that there is more pain in the world than happiness.

Our sense is so much stronger of what we suffer, than of what we enjoy, that the ideas of pain predominate in almost every mind. What is recollection but a revival of vexations, or history but a record of wars, treasons, and calamities? Death, which is considered as the greatest evil, happens to all. The greatest good, be it what it will, is the lot of but a part.

KALINOVA.
June 1918.

SILVER SPOONS

I AM an omnivorous, or I should rather say an omnipetent collector. Old copper and old silver, old wood and old glass move me to a certain if often an ignorant and vague response, and to an eager dream of possession, which nothing new can excite. The mere beauty and mellowness of their forms and hues, their surfaces and textures, arouse a quick delight of the senses that has

> no need of a remoter charm
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

Merely to roam in a musty shop, to peer into dark corners, to handle beautiful, plain old things,

is a joy which my feeble powers of discrimination hardly impair, and my feebler powers of acquisition only stimulate. To weigh the attractions of coveted objects, when all are desirable, is an added zest. To escape empty-handed is to have feasted the imagination *gratis* ; and if prudence at last succumb, there is no thrill of possession like the poor man's extravagance.

I am catholic by instinct and on principle. A narrow specialism is alien to the amateur's true spirit. To go through life with a single eye to old Wedgwood, or Georgian snuff-boxes, argues an illiberal prudence or a mean ambition. A collector should not be too careful to be sure of what he buys, or the sporting spirit will atrophy ; and he who collects that he may have the best collection, or a better than his friend's, is little more than a miser. These are the vices of collecting, which earn for collectors the repute of bores. The collector after my heart will keep his pleasure from sinking to a business ; he will indulge a generous light-heartedness and the saving grace of humour. His pride of possession will be ancillary to his pleasure in beautiful things. If the need of possession be paramount, then a pastime has become a habit and may easily turn to a disease.

So it is with an open mind and a sympathetic eye that I run the gauntlet of the shops. Yet I am

not without predilection ; my purest, most incandescent passion is for spoons. I love my spoons, and can almost without envy admire the spoons of others, for their simple beauty, for the variety which knowledge reveals, and for their sweet familiarity. Not the least of the triumphs of civilization is to have fashioned for our daily use all those utensils whose propriety and elegance refine the gross act of eating and lend a grace to social intercourse—the mahogany and the linen, the silver and china and glass. Of all these amenities I think that mugs and spoons have the most intimate, the most domestic charm. I have a mug which I cherish. It is massive and stately in design, and of a respectable antiquity, and it was a wedding gift. But an aggregation of mugs in a small suburban home—beside that mugs are costly—would be an outrage on proportion. One cannot easily have too many spoons.

Perhaps I am but half a collector after all. Your true collector keeps his treasures in shrines, for public or private devotion ; he will scarcely suffer flowers in his goblets, or so much as read his first editions. But I have little pleasure in a cloistered spoon ; a spoon that is too precious for use, and must be kept in a cabinet, looks forlorn and foolish to my eye. I would sooner risk losing the marks than keep a spoon uncleaned ; dirty copper and

brass are very well, but tarnished silver is an offence. My spoons are used ; not without apprehension, but I trust with fortitude. I like to sit down to dinner and note which spoon—for no three are of a set—I am to use to-night.

All minor works of art, indeed, lose something when they are taken out of relation to their proper use and natural environment. They are most themselves when they are in private hands and serve humble uses. When we rescue a thing of beauty from the dangers and waste of use, to lay it up in a treasury, we think to confer immortality ; but it is like taking a flower from the garden to store it in a *hortus siccus*. It is the necessary vice of museums and galleries that they are chambers of the dead. Pictures are mural decorations ; spoons are domestic utensils ; we take something from them when we hang them on walls built for no other purpose than exhibition, or range them in cabinets to display the history of the silversmith's art. What we gain in duration we lose in vitality ; and in our bravest contests with time and decay, we fight a losing battle.

I do not know if the points of a spoon have ever been laid down ; but they reveal themselves to a discerning comparison. In the first place a spoon of any size must be substantial ; it must not suggest fragility. Then the bowl should not be too shallow,

and its curve should be a rounded oblong, not egg-shaped nor pointed. The pointed bowl is a sure sign of the decadence. Finally—and on this I insist—the handle must curve upwards so that the whole is a little like a flat boat, not downwards to produce an attenuated *S*. If you have not observed this, I make bold to say you know nothing of spoons. I have heard it urged that the down-turned handle is easier to eat with ; but I have not found it so. It is certainly the destruction of symmetry. And the beauty of a spoon lies in the grace of its curve and the purity of its line. The smallest differences of contour, at the junction of bowl with handle, and at the point where the handle broadens, make or mar their purity.

The very early spoons, the apostles and the seal-tops of which base imitations are rife, are beyond my modest reach. Perhaps the grapes are sour ; but I confess I think they hardly deserve the reputation with which their age and rarity—a genuine *set* of apostles is worth a fabulous sum—has endowed them. They are pretty and curious ; but they have not the beauty of the later and simpler designs. The golden age of spoons begins, I suppose, at the Restoration and ends with George the Second. There are variations of design, which belong, at least by convention, to different reigns ; as the indented handle of a 'William and Mary'

or the trefoil-handle of a 'Queen Anne' spoon; but the solid grace and comely outline that are their common glory do not depend on these pretty flourishes.

A spoon gives little scope for ornament. A much embossed bowl is repugnant to convenience, and the handle is too narrow. It was an evil day when the engravers got to work with their scrolls and their beading. But the under-side of the bowl offers a good if a limited field to ingenuity; for spoons break at the junction of bowl and handle, and some stiffening there has structural virtue. The rat-tail is more prized than it should be; but it is a pleasant device. The 'shell' ornament is another. The broad end of the handle was left plain for armorial emblems. God forbid that I should impose my own; but I welcome the first proprietor with a good grace, and have sometimes tried to trace his identity in Burke. I have a spoon called the Elephant, who still brandishes his handsome trunk after nearly two centuries of attrition.

And then there are the marks! The early marks are deeply punched, and apart from their significance—the cut of a letter or the curve of a shield may make a century of difference—they have their own beauty. Yet a collector of silver hardly knows whether to count as gain or loss this privilege of an infallible criterion. The owner of

a putative Tudor chest may, by faith in his own *flair*, stand firm against any weight of sceptical authority. English silver carries its own guarantees of date and *provenance*—unless time has erased them—and the subtleties of critical discrimination are out of court. I am coward enough to prefer knowledge to opinion ; and as the marks on old pieces are often obliterated, the detective faculty has play enough. Or one may guess and verify one's guesses. When I dine out and find my soup embellished by a notable spoon, as may often happen to those who dine in Colleges or Inns of Court, my manners are seldom proof against temptation. I contrive a furtive scrutiny of the under-side.

A spoon is a beautifully simple thing, and the good tradition lasted well. At any time in George the Third's reign, and even later, you may find specimens not unworthy of the best period. But the secret was gradually lost, and the nineteenth century, with no very conspicuous innovation, but by virtue of its instinct of ugliness, reduced the old pattern to a pitiful poverty. It stinted silver ; it twisted the bowl to a grimace ; it engraved and decorated ; it discovered the abomination called the 'fiddle' handle. There are spoons that set my teeth on edge. Modern taste has revolted, and tries to hark back to the old beauty. But mere imitation can never deserve success, and even

in the simple matter of a spoon it somehow mysteriously fails.

There is a practical difficulty which those must face who set themselves a high standard in spoons. I know very little of forks, but I suspect that the silver fork is an innovation. I imagine that our ancestors used steel forks. At all events good forks are scarce. I have a few that are passable, but the best are not a century old, and it took me many months to find them.

There was a time when every child of fortune was born with a silver spoon in its mouth. It is a pity that the practice should ever be omitted. I should like every child to have its peculiar spoon. This should be small, yet not so small as ever to become a toy ; strong, to withstand the perils of the nursery and the use of a lifetime ; and, if possible, old.

I beguile my loneliness with fond memories, and sometimes with rash anticipations. Spoons of my dreams lie in the windows of little old shops in quiet streets of English towns. There are no spoons in Macedonia.

December 1916.

KALINOVA.

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